

Scotpress

ENTERPRISE -LOG ENTRIES 50



a **STAR TREK** fanzine

ENTERPRISE - LOG ENTRIES 50

A ScoTpress Publication



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Stencil Chewing - Shah (I'm a cat, not a glutton.)

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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona.

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Illustrations

Lee Sullivan - Cover	Barbara Gordon - P48, 52
Gayle Feyrer - P2, 38	Virginia Lee Smith - P69, 78, 80
Ann Humphrey - P26, 36, 67, 82, 86	Martin Delaney - P130, 143
Evallou Richardson - P11, 19	Roo - P147

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August 1982.

* Indicates interpretations of free illustrations by the artists.

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Hello.

Well, we made it at last, so welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 50, the first Star Trek zine - as far as we know - to reach the half-century.

As you'll see from the contents list, we have a very full issue, and we would like to thank all the writers and artists who made this possible. Although they have all worked wonders for us, there are one or two 'special mentions.'

Ann Preece, who came up with a story to a very tight deadline.

Lee Owers, who after doing one of the interpretations, found herself 'volunteered' to contribute the cover poem.

A welcome to our American contributors, writers and artists. We are delighted to have two illos by Gayle Feyrer, and Barbara Gordon has given us our first nude Kirk. (Page 52, for those of you who are impatient!)

Lee Sullivan, for his cover; he not only did the artwork, but arranged the printing.

Roo, for her on-the-spot portrayal of the Chain Gang in action.

Several artists did drawings for interpretation - unfortunately, the one by Martin Delaney does not appear in this issue. His drawing contained one element which, while adding to the drama, proved very challenging to explain. Two different writers tried to interpret this, but before they were satisfied, our deadline had passed. Martin's picture and the interpretations will be appearing in a later issue. We do, however, have other artwork by this excellent and valued artist.

The final word in Enterprise - Log Entries 50 belongs to the Chain Gang, without whose assistance at the end of production this zine would have taken a lot longer to reach you. Anyone who has ever attempted to collate anything will know how tedious and monotonous a job this is - not to say backbreaking. For their assistance in this, as with all our zines, our heartfelt gratitude.

We hope that you enjoy the material that has been contributed for this special issue. It was originally intended to be a double issue; like Topsy, it 'just grewed', and has finished up as a triple issue.

Now, where did I put the stories for Enterprise - Log Entries 51....?

Valerie

Hello, everyone. We've come a long way since the days of Log Entries 1 - which was put out as a limited issue of 100 copies 'way back in the autumn of 1975 when Janet Quarton, Beth Hallam and I took over the running of STAG from Jenny Elson, who had been forced by ill-health to cut back on her fannish activities. Beth and I did the stencils for that first issue between us, using stories that had been written for Janet over the preceding year or two, and Beth ran them off on a school duplicator after 4 o'clock, collating them all herself, and handling sales. The next few issues were typed and printed by me (I had obtained access to a Teachers' Centre duplicator), collated by me, then sent down to Beth. In those days the average length of an issue was 35 pages.

By Log Entries 7, we were getting more submissions, and the length was increased to 50 pages, give or take two or three. (We've stayed at this length ever since, because it proved to be the most convenient collating length. I'm not looking forward to collating this issue, and can only have the utmost respect for those editors who regularly put out zines of 150 + pages.) About the same time, several things happened; first, Beth, who had been having trouble with her thyroid for some years, literally collapsed during the weekend of the Liverpool con and had to withdraw from active fandom for an indefinite period. Second, I found some helpers for collating - Peter Grant and Brian Topping. Peter still helps occasionally, but Brian's work took him out of the Dundee area a few months later. Third, Valerie had begun to help us - mad, rash fool!

The number of fans in the Dundee area was growing, however, and by the time Brian left, I'd met Allison. Peter introduced Lorraine to us...then Hilde and Frances joined the club, and Cory, who had been a member for some time, moved into the area; the Chain Gang had been formed. And in addition to the regular members of it, Nicola Moore and Linda Hannah occasionally help us too.

Then, after five years of running STAG, we decided that we were becoming stale; we wanted more time to 'do our own thing'. We were still interested in putting out zines, and so ScoTpress came into being. We had decided - somewhat reluctantly - that we'd have to start a new genzine, when Sylvia suggested that we take the name 'Log Entries with us - thank you, Sylvia!' - as she would be starting a new genzine herself, to mark the change of committee running the club. As most of you know, we took a year to make the changeover in order that it proceed as smoothly as possible, but started ScoTpress right away.

We'd like to thank the writers and artists who have supported us by sending us their work; but most of all we'd like to thank you, the readers, for also continuing to support us by buying our zines.

Putting out zines is hard work, but we enjoy doing it. Your enjoyment of the stories we print is all the thanks that we - and the writers - require.

Hilde

Hi, there. As Sheila has said, she printed the first few Log Entries, but after I moved back home in May 1976 we had to look for a duplicator for the newsletters, etc. We bought 'Freda', a Roneo duplicator, from the Elvis Presley Fan Club. She did us well for a couple of years, but then needed a major overhaul, and since she was 10 years old we decided to buy a newer model. 'James T.' joined us in October 1978 when he was about three years old. During the next three years we worked him very hard, and just before we handed STAG over to Sylvia we found out that he needed a major overhaul. We decided, with Sylvia's agreement, to buy him from STAG and pay for the overhaul ourselves. Hopefully he will now happily churn out zines for a number of years to come...as happily as we hope you are reading them.

Jack

I think it is unfair to call me a distraction - it is the zines which are a distraction as they take everyone's attention from me!

Sheila

HOW CAN IT TAKE FOREVER...?

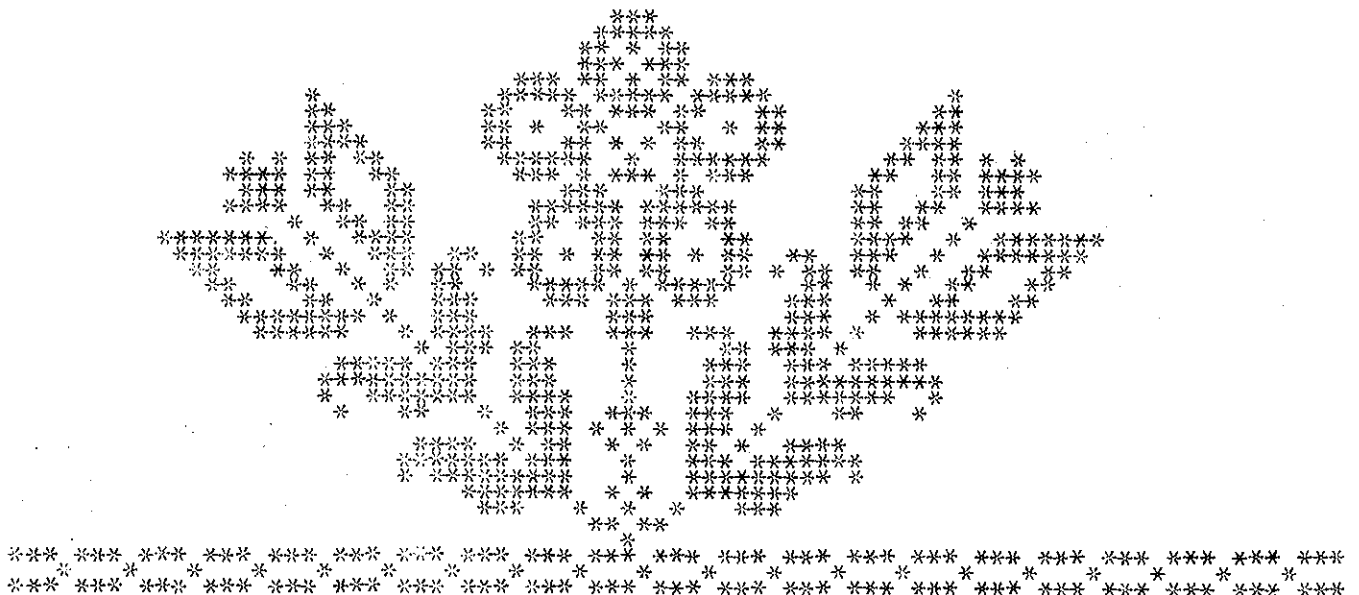
Down safe. Alone,
 but all too vulnerably exposed.
 Our instincts turn us back to back,
 to scan the desolate horizons of this lethal plain
 where swift and silent death befell your men.
 My instruments show nothing yet I feel
 your hand go to your side, your phaser drawn.
 No chances. No mistakes. Technology can never quite replace
 the so-called 'sixth-sense' of a man...
 The silence grows oppressive, for your calculated calm
 has failed to overcome my fears.
 For how long has it been this way? My disapproval; your resentment.
 Why do you risk yourself and how can I expect you not to go?
 A mutual anger and an understanding:
 if you must be here, then it will be with me at your side.

Still nothing. Relaxation creeping in...
 Perhaps, this time, our pessimism was -
 - THE LIGHT! -

My arm flies upward to protect my eyes,
 but still I cannot see what lies beyond the glare...
 Only the frantic racing of my pulse suggests this is the thing we seek.
 Beware!
 You spin and drop to face our nebulous aggressor -
 Why do you hesitate? Act now, before it is too late!
 A shoulder roll... a sprint... in there, where you will stand a chance...
 But you have frozen and the steel-glint of your gaze
 speaks only of desire for vengeance, not escape.
 There is no time to drag you clear - the light is stronger -
 I will not save myself and leave you here!
 And so I launch myself in your direction,
 knowing your only hope lies in the fragile shield of my embrace.
 Why do my senses lie, now, when it's most important?
 How can it take forever
 to traverse so brief a space?

Lee Owers

(From the cover by Lee Sullivan)

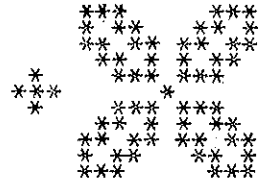
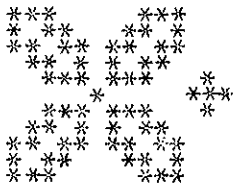




IN THE GARDEN

by

Meg Wright



Out here in the garden it is cool following the cruel heat of the Vulcan day, the evening light restful after the bright suns' glare, and deep in the shadows of still, growing things we can find a moment's repose from the tensions of our visit to this home that is alien to both of us. Without speaking we pause, and by common consent, sink down on a bank of green close by the outer force wall, away from the eyes that may be watching us from the house.

It is good to be alone together, to have time to collect our thoughts. Secure in each other's company we do not feel the need to talk, but sit in companionate silence for a while.

Will I ever be able to put into words : what this moment means to me? What you mean to me also, my Vulcan friend? Can anything as banal as language touch the simplicity of what I feel at your side? The more I try and give precise coherence to my thoughts, the more I complicate what should be plain and clear.

But I have to try, in order to capture and hold the precious gift of serenity you have restored to my life. All the jangling torment of these last years is behind me, not to be forgotten - oh no, never that - but accepted and discarded as irrelevant to what I am now.

I look up at you and smile, seeing a response warm your eyes, a fleeting impression that lends animation to your face behind its careful, Vulcan veneer.

You are so like... Him! So like, and yet so different that I could never mistake you for him, nor he for you. He could never pretend to own the deep well of compassion that lies within you. With him I was always afraid, always alone. Most alone when with him; I have never known such loneliness, felt so defenceless and abjectly worthless as I did in his company.

Degradation.

There: did you hear the deep sigh of content as I laid my head on your

knee in a gesture of love - trying to say with the gentleness of touch what I fear to speak aloud in case the moment is spoilt?

I am not very good with words, but I think that you hear me, for a warm, comforting hand enfolds my shoulder.

You are quiet, my friend. So quiet and still that for a brief moment I experience a pang of concern, wondering if you are bored, if you would rather move on. But no, it seems you have little of my lost friend's restlessly questing spirit.

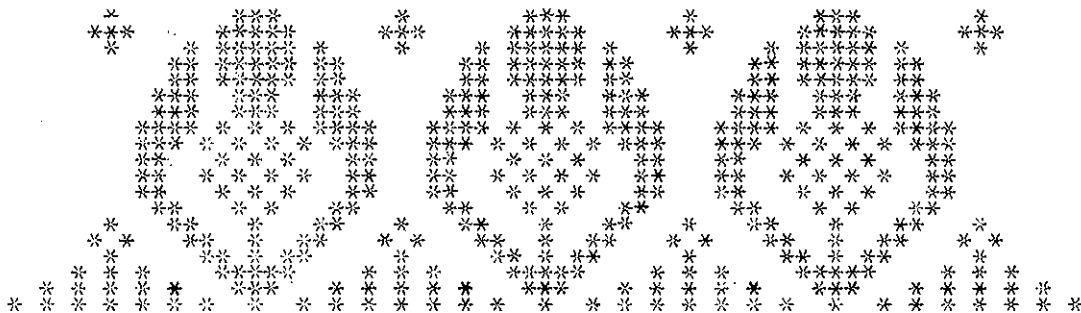
I have come home.

The thought is suddenly there in my mind, completed and accepted even before I fully understand what I mean by it.

Home is at your side, in the quiet, undemanding tranquillity you create around you, and I have found what I searched for at last. Your compelling charm draws me to you in whatever universe I find you: in whatever circumstances we were paired I would always yearn to be at your side - but I am only now beginning to see the rightness of your particular spirit matched to mine. Your needs have drawn responses from me I might otherwise have found hard to give. With you I can be myself, just as I am, without fear of disapproval or suppressed amusement.

We belong, you and I; your hold on me is childlike and trusting, not demanding response and yet wistfully pleading acknowledgement.

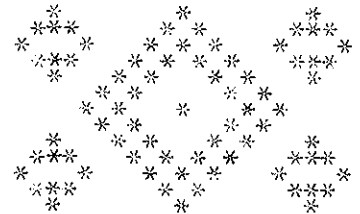
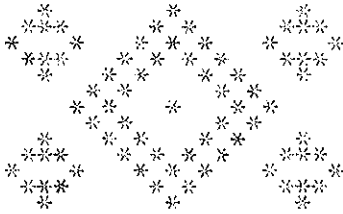
I touch your shoulder, contented to be here with you, and neither of us speaks until the quiet fluttering of a moth breaks your reverie.



GOLDEN DAYS

by

Vicki Richards



Kirk walked the Observation Deck alone. Finally he halted and looked out upon the stars, at the myriad beauties of the galaxies, the wonders of the universe. How could he ever have thought that anywhere else but out here, on his own silver ship, could be home to him?

He shook his head, at himself more than anyone or anything else, trying to sort out his feelings. So many different emotions he had gone through in the last few days! It was as if he had been half asleep, and only the return to his ship had been able to waken him. His return to his ship - and his friends.

It did not really seem possible that the Enterprise was his again; but she was. And after the encounter with V'Ger, there was no way they could take her from him again. Nogura knew now that Starfleet's best interests were served by Kirk staying right where he was, on the best Starship in the Fleet.

Yet still he could not believe that the last few days were real; he was afraid that something would happen to make it all come untrue. As he stood there and gazed out into the black velvet heavens he knew that ever since V'Ger had gone and Earth was safe again, ever since he had ordered Scotty to take her 'out there', something had been worrying him. Worrying him badly. He tried to tell himself it was only that his unbelievable good fortune was making him unsettled, but he could not dismiss the worrying thoughts from his mind.

He was afraid that Spock would yet go back to Vulcan.

He remembered that moment when the turbolift doors had opened and the one person he had not expected to see stepped out. Indeed, he would never be able to forget that moment, etched indelibly as it was into his memory.

The one person who above all he had wanted to see had suddenly stepped onto the Bridge practically out of nowhere, and instead of returning his glad, amazed greeting Spock had acted as if Kirk was a perfect stranger - or worse, acted as if the friendship between them had never existed.

When the Vulcan had gone to the new science console, Kirk had wanted to go after him and shake him, make him respond to his friendship and be the old Spock again. But he could not. All he could do was watch dumbly as Spock took over from Decker, watch as he did his old job with the same old efficiency, with a horror lurking inside him that the rigours of Kolinahr had actually managed to destroy Spock's Human side forever.

Then McCoy and Chapel had come, and the Vulcan had frozen them out too. Kirk had seen the same puzzled hurt on McCoy's face that he felt inside him. At that wonderful moment when he had realised Spock was actually there on the Bridge of the Enterprise, he had thought that the misery of the last two years was finally behind him for good.

But was Spock really there? Certainly not the Spock he knew.

Later, in the Officers' Lounge, he had tried to get him to talk. Asking him questions about the intelligence he had sensed in space, he had hoped that during the conversation the Vulcan would open up, show some sign that inside him was still the friend James Kirk had valued so much.

But Spock had remained distant. The time at Gol had left its mark on him: there were deep lines on his face; he was thinner than he ought to be; and his dark alien eyes seemed to stare right through Kirk. When he had left, and McCoy had started raising questions about his motives, Kirk had felt a loneliness deeper than he had felt for many years. Yet he could never believe that Spock, even this very different Spock, could ever have anything but the best of motives.

He told McCoy so.

It was not until they had entered the cloud, and Spock had almost lost his life in the attempt to discover what the threat to Earth really was, that Kirk had seen the slightest sign for hope that the Spock he had known had not really vanished for ever.

He had gone out after him, as in the old days, not knowing if he was alive but praying that even this cold, changed Spock would come back to him once more. And he had, once more against all the odds, and when in Sickbay he had finally come round, his laugh had been the very last thing that Kirk had expected to hear.

But it had been the very best, gladdest sound James Kirk had heard in a very long while, and when Spock had grabbed his hand and spoken to him, Kirk was left in no doubt that his old friend was back, perhaps more truly than he had been even in the old days.

So they had ended the menace to Earth, and the Enterprise was his again. It was almost twenty-four Earth standard hours since they had left orbit around the Enterprise's home planet, and the shakedown was going well. Spock had said that his business on Vulcan was finished, but was it? He knew in his heart that it had been his own acceptance of the Admiralty, however much Nogura's manipulation had had to do with that, which had caused Spock to resign and depart for Gol. But if such a friendship as they had shared before could be disrupted once, why should he think everything would be all right now?

As he stared outwards and tried to order his thoughts, he did not hear silent footsteps approach him from behind, nor did he notice that he was no longer alone on the Observation Deck until the tall figure of the Vulcan stood beside him.

"I thought that you might be here." Spock spoke quietly, his voice no longer having that hard edge it had held when he had first returned to them.

"Just watching the stars. And thinking." Kirk smiled, glad to see that his friend no longer looked quite so gaunt as he had done a few days previously. Vulcans are tough, he told himself. He had no doubt that in time Spock would recover from all the physical effects the rigours of the Kolinahr had had on him. If he didn't go back to them.

"I have had the idea," Spock said with a directness that oddly surprised Kirk, "that you have been worrying about something."

"What gives you that idea?" Kirk couldn't help but grin; he had thought he had hidden his feelings quite well. He should have known Spock better.

"Jim - I know you. You are worried about something. Please, let me help."

Those three words again. They seemed to follow him through the years. He decided that if anyone had the right to know, Spock had.

"The Kolinahr, Spock - you didn't finish it?"

"I completed the training." Spock was beginning to get the idea of what was wrong. He had thought it might be something like that.

"Do you think... you might ever want to go back to Gol?" It was out now; he would know the answer soon enough.

Spock shook his head, aware now that he was the total cause of Kirk's anxiety. "No. I did not receive the symbol because, although I had mastered the training, I knew I could not accept it, since my Human half was not extinguished. Then, I was ashamed that I had failed; now, I know that I was wrong even to try to extinguish it."

"You do?" Glimmers of hope were beginning to appear to Kirk.

"Yes. As Master T'Sai said, my answer lies elsewhere. It does. Here. On the Enterprise, where I belong. With my friends." He smiled suddenly in the

darkness of the ship's night as he had done when he had awoken in Sickbay. "The Enterprise is my home as well, Jim. I shall not willingly leave her again."

"That's all I wanted to hear." Kirk put his hand on the Vulcan's shoulder and began to steer him towards the turbolift, his heart a good deal lighter. "Come on - it's a long time since we played a game of chess together, and Bones is in Sickbay with a new bottle of Saurian brandy and no-one to help him drink it. Let's go and show him what friends are for."

The two men entered the turbolift, both knowing that now, at last, those golden days aboard the old Enterprise had returned; and this time, if it could be possible, they would be even better than before.

Behind them the Observation Deck was empty; but no longer did it seem lonely.



WHERE NO MAN...

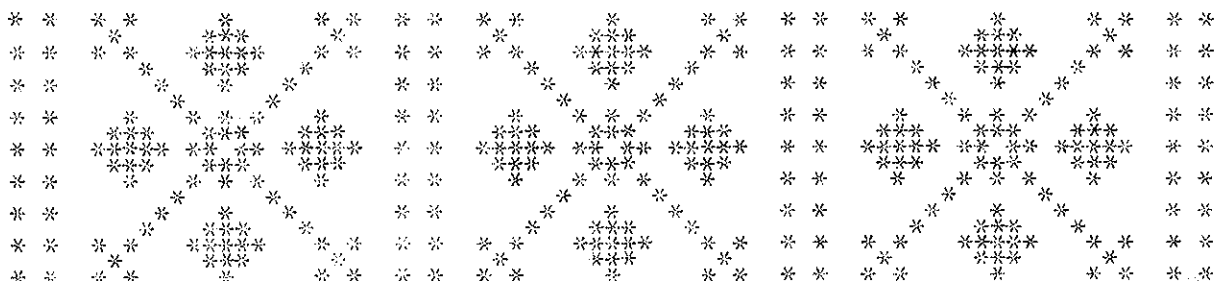
Born to ride among the stars,
To search beyond the touch of man,
The galaxy's outer span.
To boldly go "where no man has gone before."

Trapped by time... an alien thought!
Do you feel?
What were you taught?
Free to roam yet never caught,
A tangled web... emotion.

Are you what was meant to be...
Only what others see?
How does your torn heart beat?
Two worlds within you meet.
Feeling, my friend... is bittersweet.

A spangled web... this universe,
Colours in a spectrum burst,
Wandering among the stars...
One Being... two halves?
Love with friendship's hand
Came... unbidden.

Ann Smith



DAWN LIGHT by Susan Meek

It's morning,
 And sunlight comes pouring in through the window,
 But it's early still, so I won't wake him yet.
 It's become my custom, this past week or so,
 To lie here for a while
 And savour the freshness of the early morning;
 Watching his face in repose
 And observing how the play of light upon his body
 Highlights the beauty of his sleeping form.
 I try to freeze the picture in my mind
 As though to capture his essence
 For some future day when perhaps he is not so close.

James T. Kirk, legend...

His reputation had preceeded him, of course.
 From that first moment in Nogura's office
 I began to understand why...
 There was no denying that he was just as handsome as the
 stories had said,
 Or that the spark of interest shining in his eyes
 Had kindled another within my own...

It didn't take long for the Admiral to note the attraction,
 Or to suggest that perhaps our youngest Admiral
 Needed 'a stabilising influence in his life'.
 Getting to know him better was a 'duty'
 I found neither unpleasant nor difficult...
 But whatever the initial intentions
 The tables were soon turned
 And the one who had sought to ensnare
 Soon became caught within her own trap...

Others, more envious, perhaps,
 Said I might catch him, but would never hold him,
 But in the year we've been together
 He's been everything I could have hoped...
 Faithful, tender, considerate...
 Husband as well as lover.

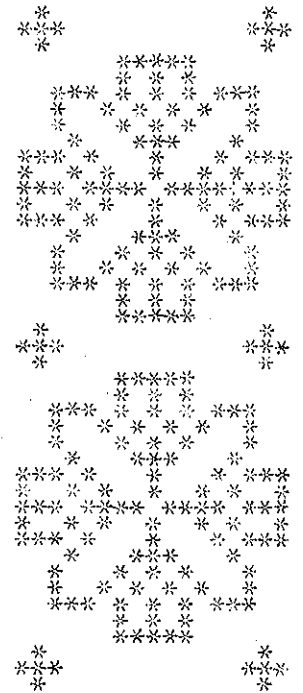
Yet for all he's shown me of himself
 There's a part of him I've never been allowed to know;
 Revealed only in rare moments
 When he thinks there is no-one to see.
 I've seen him standing in this room
 When he thought himself unobserved
 With the Vulcan IDIC he usually keep hidden away
 Clutched tightly in his hands...
 I've heard a name whispered
 In the quiet of darkness
 As he tosses beside me in restless sleep.
 I've seen him look up at the sky
 As though searching for something indefinable,
 And at such times the look that comes into his eyes
 Speaks of an inner emptiness...
 As though he has lost something very precious.

He misses his ship, I know,
But this is something more;
Like a sickness of the soul,
A hurt I know I cannot heal.

Our contract will terminate soon,
And though I'm sure that we'll stay close
Somehow, I know it won't be renewed.
There's been a restlessness within him of late
Which perhaps he won't admit, even to himself.
I've come to know his pride, and it might not be easy
For him to acknowledge that he's chosen the wrong course.
But he can't deny it much longer,
Or the allure of the stars...

He'll awaken soon,
Turn his golden smile on me
And prepare to face the new day,
Pretending an enthusiasm I know he doesn't feel.

So for now I'll just stay close, and give him all the loving
I have.
One day, I know,
It won't be enough.



*** ** ** ** **

A CAGED BIRD

Asleep... she floats.
Nestling deep inside a framework
like a caged bird...
Trapped, yearning for freedom.
Soon, I will release her,
to glide silently out into the vastness of space
between the tiny pinpricks of brilliance.
Her grace overshadowed only by her beauty.
For she is mine, once more.
Returned to me for just a few short hours -
I am her Captain.
Two years we have been apart -
two long, wretched years.
I have missed her.
The feel of her decks beneath my feet,
to gaze through her eyes
at the patterns of the stars
as they slip by.
I have waited for this moment -
hoping beyond all hope
that she would some day be mine once again.
Now the time has come
and there is only one small shadow of sadness
to cloud my happiness today...



If only Spock were with me now,
to share my joy.

Linda Hughes.

*** ** ** ** *

A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

by

Doreen DaBinett

The Andorian looked across the desk at the fair-haired, jaunty figure sitting opposite him. So this was the Human he had heard so much about! He seemed far too young for all the tales to be true, but if even half of them were...

"You wanted to see me, sir? I do have a lot to do on the Base, and..." Firm but polite.

"Yes, Captain." The Andorian picked up a scribe and pointed it at the Human. "You know, of course, that the Vallorian is also in orbit?"

"Yes - she arrived just after us," Kirk replied.

"Quite. Her crew are due for survival tests, like yours, Captain."

"So I heard, sir." Kirk noted the Andorian's antennae quivering, and knew at once that his superior was hiding something. Andorians could never stop their antennae from giving them away. He smiled to himself; it was surprising what he had learned about various aliens over the years, partly through his own observance, and partly with his First Officer's help.

"I wish you to pick 5 of your general crew personnel, plus 5 of your senior officers, and of course yourself. They will be pitted against an equal number from the Vallorian."

Kirk nodded; he had expected as much. The Vallorian he knew was crewed by Vulcans, but he would bet his men and Spock against all of them any day, and he smiled confidently.

"There is just one other thing, Captain." The Andorian smiled as Kirk's eyebrows rose in enquiry. "Your First Officer is, I believe, a Vulcan?"

"Yes, he is." Spock, after all, did consider himself a Vulcan first and foremost.

"The crew of the Vallorian are, as you know, also Vulcan. Unfortunately their Captain has been called away, something personal, I understand, and cannot therefore lead his men. Also his First Officer has only been newly appointed, and is not as experienced as Commander Spock."

Damn! Kirk knew what was coming.

"As Commander Spock is also a Vulcan, and is available, I am sure you will not object if he is transferred to the Vallorian's crew on a temporary basis and leads their team?"

Kirk knew he had no choice; he managed to smile tightly as he replied, "Of course not, sir. I'm sure Commander Spock will consider it an honour."

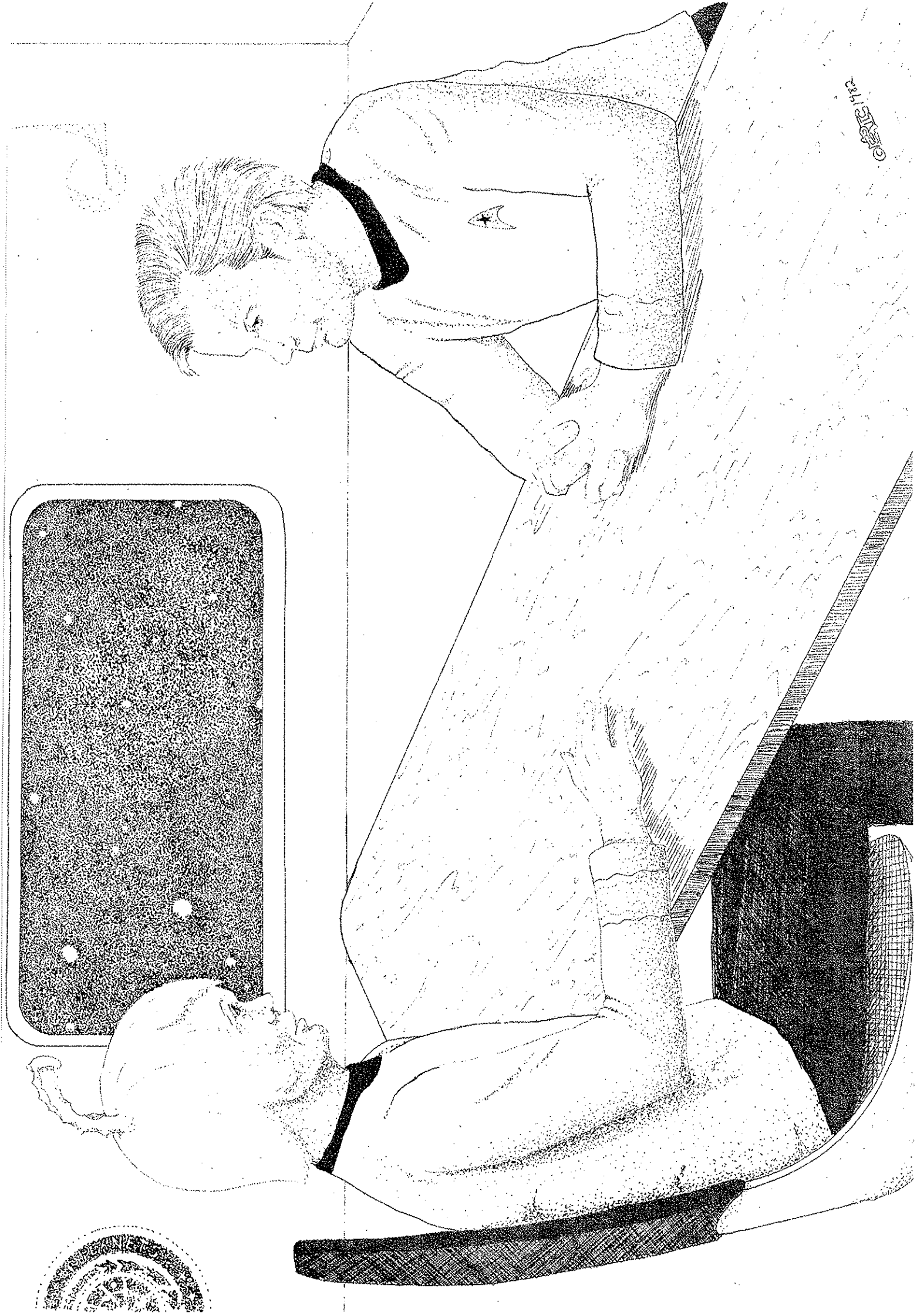
He rose, saluted, and ten minutes later was beaming back to the Enterprise, still fuming. He wasn't unduly surprised to find the Vulcan waiting for him in the Transporter Room. He stepped down and stalked to the door with his First Officer in tow.

"Been waiting long, Spock?" he asked as the door opened.

"Only a few minutes, sir."

"Good." Kirk stepped into the turbolift and ordered Deck 5, then turned to look up into his friend's lean face. "We were right. It is the survival test, and we're up against the Vallorians - all Vulcans, Spock."

"Yes, I am aware of that, Captain. The tests will no doubt be arranged so as not to allow them any advantage over us by virtue of their physique," the deep voice intoned.



"Yeah, I guess you're right."

The brown eyes bored down into his. "What is wrong, Jim?" Spock asked as the lift stopped and they alighted.

Kirk headed straight for his quarters and waved the Vulcan in before he replied.

"Hell, am I that obvious?"

The stern face relaxed somewhat. "To me, yes."

Kirk grinned. "You're right, of course. I'm just so damn mad about it."

"About what?" the calm voice pressed.

"About the fact that the Vallorian Captain is indisposed, his First Officer is still wet behind the ears, and Zaphod wants you to lead their team!" Kirk said in a rush. The hazel eyes searched the stern features of his First Officer for a reaction to his words - any reaction, regret, perhaps? But he was disappointed.

"Indeed." The Vulcan stood, his hands characteristically clasped behind his back as he returned the gaze.

"Is that all you've got to say?" Kirk asked, irritated and trying desperately to hide it.

"It should prove interesting, Captain," Spock murmured non-committally; then, "Jim, I shall of course have to apply myself fully to this task. I would not have asked for this, but..."

"But what, Commander?" Kirk took a short step backwards as though slapped; did Spock think he was asking for favours? Hell! His eyes hardened suddenly. "I would expect nothing less, Commander."

The Vulcan realised at once that his unfortunate choice of words had worked in his disfavour yet again. He had not meant to hurt Jim's feelings, but had simply wished to explain what he must do; and he did not wish Kirk to misconstrue his dedicated approach to the task of defeating - if possible - his Captain and the crew of the Enterprise. He began haltingly to try to explain further, but knew he had failed when Kirk interrupted him quickly.

"And what makes you think you're going to win, Commander? We're not exactly novices ourselves, you know."

"I did not mean..."

"No? Good, 'cause we're going to beat the pants off you and the Vallorians, and what've you got to say to that?" Kirk demanded, his chin jutting forward challengingly.

"I trust you are not disappointed, Captain," Spock replied stiffly. "With your permission, sir, I will beam over to the Vallorian tonight in order that I may acquaint myself with the crew."

Kirk nodded, his temper disappearing as quickly as it had come. "And Spock..."

The Vulcan turned back. "Sir?"

"I'll be trying too, you know," he said softly.

The dark head nodded slowly. "I would expect no less, Captain."

The door closed.

* * *

McCoy grinned broadly. "So we've got Spock and a bunch of Vulcans against us. It should prove interesting."

"Bones." Kirk looked pained at the use of the word.

"Sorry, Jim boy, but it does rub off after a few years, you know."

"Yeah, I do know," Kirk said quietly. "I was mad at first, even with Spock, as though it was his fault, poor devil. Ran away at the mouth a bit, too. Truth is, I guess I've just come to rely on his always being there... and when I told him, he just seemed so... so indifferent, neutral, couldn't care less... It just got to me, I guess."

The Doctor chuckled. "Well, now's your chance to see what it's really like without him."

"Not just without, Bones, but with him on the other side."

"Yes, that too. Mind you, it'll do him good."

Kirk's eyebrows rose as the doctor continued, "Everyone needs to prove that they're as good as the next guy sometimes, even Spock. In fact, more so Spock - he doesn't get much chance with you around, does he?" McCoy smiled at Kirk's incredulous look. "And don't come the innocent with me, Jim Kirk, I've known you too damn long. You can be overwhelming at times, you know, and unlike me, he can't tell you to 'get stuffed' occasionally when you're too big for your pants, my boy!"

"Am I that bad?"

"Yeah, sometimes."

Kirk laughed shortly. "You're right."

"Mind you, I'm not saying I'm not going to miss that egotistical maniac, 'cause I will - but don't you dare tell him that."

"Not me, Bones. Just as long as you don't tell him how much I'm going to miss him too!"

"That's a deal, Jim."

* * *

Kirk walked into the Briefing Room on Starbase 3 with Lieutenant-Commander Montgomery Scott as his temporary Exec., to find Spock, with another Vulcan at his shoulder, deep in conversation with the Admiral. They all looked up as the Humans entered, and the Andorian at least smiled a welcome.

"Please come in, gentlemen. I have just given Commander Spock his orders, here are yours." Kirk accepted the visitape. "And here, Captain, Commander, is your objective and the terrain you will be crossing."

The Andorian activated the viewer. The pictures slipped by rapidly, and Kirk only had a brief chance of seeing rocks, mountains and plateaus - all fairly forbidding.

The Admiral snapped off the viewer. "You will both, of course, start at the same time, but from different points equi-distant from your destination. The first party to arrive will be the winners, but it must be the entire party - if anyone is injured they must be carried and not left behind."

"And what if they're too bad to be carried, sir?" Scotty interposed.

"In that case it may be necessary to concede in favour of your opponents," the Admiral said quickly. "But that, of course, will be the decision of your senior officer. Anything further, gentlemen?"

"No," Spock replied, and Kirk shook his head.

"Very well, and may the best team win."

They all filed out of the door, saluting as they went. As they entered the corridor, Kirk found Spock beside him.

"Good luck, Spock," he said softly.

"I do not believe in luck, Captain," the calm voice replied.

"No," Kirk smiled slightly, "of course not." He damped down his anger at what he considered an unnecessary reply to his olive branch, then continued, "But you can always give us a yell if you need any help - we'll be up in front of you somewhere!"

He turned to his Chief Engineer, annoyed at himself for his unnecessary jibe, feeling the dark eyes following him all the way to the Transporter. Damn! He had done it again.

* * *

Sulu took the visitape from the viewer as his Captain looked around the sea of faces. "Well, now you all know as much as I do, any questions?"

"As they're all Vulcans, sair, is it going to be fair?" Chekov asked.

"Yes, apparently, Mr. Chekov. The computer and the Admiral's Staff have worked out each course, taking into account our physical differences. I'm sure the one Commander Spock and the team from the Vallorian will take will be a damn sight harder than ours."

"I hope you're right," McCoy murmured. "Scotty and I aren't as young as we used to be."

"No," Kirk conceded, with his eyes twinkling, "but you're still two of my most experienced officers, especially now Spock's with the opposition. Besides, you both need the exercise." Before McCoy could retaliate he went on, "So if there's nothing further, I'll see you all at the beamdown point at planet dawn..." He looked around. "Very well. Goodnight, gentlemen. Dismissed."

* * *

"Hell, what do they expect us to do with this?" Henderson from the Biology Section demanded of whoever was listening to him.

"Do with what, Lieutenant?" Kirk enquired as he materialised.

"I've been checking the supplies, sir, the ones they've left for us."

"And?" Kirk pressed.

"And I think they're inadequate, sir. Look." He pointed to the meagre pile of medical supplies. "There are no painkillers, no plastiskin, next to nothing in the way of hypos..."

"He's right, Jim," McCoy said testily, "and I'm not allowed to take my own medikit either."

Kirk chewed his lip thoughtfully as the Security Chief joined in. "I only hope there aren't any predators out there, Captain. We've got no weapons of any kind."

"There's a communicator here," Ensign Greene piped up, "but it says here, only to be used in cases of dire emergency, and only to be used once."

Kirk looked across at Mr. Scott. "What's there, Scotty?"

"Precious little, Captain - a rope and a few other bits and pieces."

"Jim," McCoy said softly, "this is ridiculous - we can't just go galloping off over that sort of terrain out there with these." He gestured about him.

Kirk was silent for a moment as he stared into the distance, then turned. "I imagine the Vulcans are similarly equipped, Bones, and I can't imagine Spock refusing to go, can you?"

"Ye're right, Captain. I dinna think any o' thae laddies would refuse, Doctor, and neither must we."

"Mmmm... I suppose you're right, Scotty," McCoy admitted grudgingly.

"Aye, that I am, Leonard." He looked across at Lt. Havers. "Now, is that an axe you've found there, lassie? Better give it to me."

McCoy wondered briefly what use the axe would be to them, but obviously it was considered necessary or it wouldn't be with the supplies. His question was soon answered, as within an hour of starting out they entered an almost impenetrable jungle and began to hack their way through, taking it in turns with the axe.

"It didn't look as bad as this on the viewer," Sulu muttered.

The Security Chief handed the axe to Chekov and dropped back to his Captain's side. "We don't seem to be making much headway, sir."

"So I noticed," Kirk admitted.

"I'd be happier with just one small phaser, Captain - we could use it to cut through this undergrowth, too," the Chief said.

"Which is probably why we weren't given one," Kirk replied. "That would be too easy."

"Yes, I suppose you're right." He smiled at his Captain. "I guess my job makes me a bit of a pessimist," he admitted.

Kirk laughed softly. "Perhaps, Chief, but I know the feeling."

* * *

Spock stood looking up into the overcast sky, then looked down as he sensed the silent figure waiting discreetly at his side to be noticed.

"Yes, Mr. Siang?"

"I wondered why we are stopping, sir," he said respectfully.

"Humans need rest breaks, Mr. Siang," Spock replied.

"But we are not Human, sir." The Vulcan looked slightly surprised.

Spock realised he was younger than he had assumed, for he had obviously not learned proper facial control yet. No matter - he would not rebuke him for the moment.

"No, we are not Human, Mr. Siang, but I noticed that the Admiral has allowed rest periods for both groups. If we did not take these breaks, we would be taking an unfair advantage, would we not?" An eyebrow rose challengingly. "Are you advocating that we adopt that course of action?"

"No, sir." The young Vulcan drew himself up straight. "Of course not." He moved away, aware of his superior's dark eyes following him.

* * *

Kirk chewed on the nutri-bar and strolled over to where Sulu sat with his boot off while McCoy examined his foot. "Everything okay?" he asked as he drew close.

"I've got a blister," Sulu replied sheepishly.

"You should have changed these boots at once - you must have felt they were rubbing," McCoy grumbled.

"New boots always do," Sulu retorted defensively.

"Mine don't!" the doctor snapped.

"Too late now, Bones," Kirk interrupted. "You'd better be more careful about the size another time, Mr. Sulu."

"I haven't even got any plastiskin to spray on it," the doctor said.

"Well, he'll just have to do what I did when I was a kid," Kirk replied. "Tie a bit of material around your toe before you put your boot back on. It'll help a bit."

"Yes, Captain, I'll try that," Sulu said with a smile, as Kirk nodded and moved off with the doctor beside him.

"Jim, this is madness," McCoy said yet again. "I'd like to get my hands on the one who compiled our medical requirements. Fine for Vulcans, maybe - they can heal themselves, or at least suppress the pain; what the hell do we do?"

"Grin and bear it, I guess," Kirk said ruefully. He turned suddenly. "Look, Bones, I'm not against you, I'm on your side, right? I agree with all you say, but we're stuck with it, and moaning is only going to lower morale, so just give it a break, huh?" The hazel eyes opened wide, and the blue ones crinkled in response.

"You're right, of course," McCoy agreed sheepishly. "Just give me a swift kick up the ass if I get out of line again, Captain."

Kirk clapped his shoulder lightly. "I might just do that," he promised.

* * *

The Humans stood in a line and stared in dismay at the near-vertical wall of rock that faced them.

"Now I can see why they gave us a rope," Sulu murmured.

"Aye, but one of us has to get up there first, laddie, before it's of any use," Scotty retorted.

The Security Chief standing beside him nodded agreement.

Kirk quickly ascertained that apart from Stephens, Sulu and Havers, he was the only one with rock climbing experience, none of the others having done any apart from the obligatory classes at the Academy. Scotty had had some experience in his native Scotland, but that had been in his youth.

"Well, Mr. Spock and I went climbing on Atlam three months ago, so it looks like I'm elected," Kirk said wryly. He began to scan the rock face for the best route and then started to climb with McCoy's "Take care, Jim" still ringing in his ears.

He was only halfway up when it began to drizzle, the sheer rock face becoming even more treacherous with every passing second. Two hours after he had started he finally heaved himself onto the rocky plateau at the top and lay gasping for breath for several seconds, listening to the cheers of his crew far below. He had not realised he was so out of condition - missing a workout here and there because of the pressure of work soon took its toll, and he vowed not to let it happen again as he looked around for a suitable rock to anchor the rope. Within a few minutes the first man started to climb.

There were only three casualties, and on the now-slippery rock, Kirk was only surprised there had not been more. Jenkins sprained a wrist, Chekov got a nasty gash in his leg, and McCoy dropped the communicator he had been carrying. They all watched in dismay as it bumped and bounced its way to the bottom of the cliff.

"I'll go back for it," McCoy volunteered at once.

"No use, Leonard - it'll be no good now," Scotty replied. "They're just not built to take that sort of treatment." He shook his head.

"He's right, Bones. Forget it. It can't be helped. We'll just have to make sure we don't have any emergencies, won't we?" Kirk said quickly, and he mentally crossed his fingers as they set off once more. He had a nasty feeling about this - that familiar tingle at the back of his neck.

* * *

Several hours later and two others had bad cuts and grazes, and everyone seemed to be covered in bruises as they slipped and slithered their way across the high plateau. The rain had now turned to a steady downpour, and they were

all soaked to the skin. The gentle bantering had stopped as each man concentrated on just putting one foot in front of the other. Kirk stopped, staring ahead, and heard Sulu stop beside him. "Oh, hell!" the helmsman murmured as he saw why his Captain had stopped.

"What's up?" McCoy asked, trying to rub the water out of his eyes.

Kirk turned as the rest of the bedraggled team drew to a halt. "There's a ravine just up ahead. Stay here - I want to see how deep it is, and if we can get across."

Kirk disappeared into the swirling rain, to reappear a few moments later, his face grim. Knowing how weary his people were by now, he tried not to project his own tiredness into his voice. Damn it, their spirits were low enough without making it worse, but he couldn't hide the unpleasant fact that they were not even halfway to their target. They had nowhere near enough basic equipment for their immediate survival, especially on the top of this mountain with night coming on. The Vulcan party would also be finding the terrain they had to cover tough, and Kirk wondered briefly how Spock was coping. He drew the Security Chief and Mr. Scott to one side to discuss their next move.

* * *

Spock looked up as T'Shal drew close. "I cannot understand why we have been given all this unnecessary equipment, Leader," she said. "Also the medical supplies. I realise, of course, that it is necessary for Humans, but surely..."

"I also wondered," Spock admitted. "It would appear that the Admiral's staff considered it fair that we should carry an equal amount of equipment to Captain Kirk's team."

The young Healer nodded. "You are no doubt correct."

They both fell silent, she to study the Vulcan hybrid who had become a living legend among his own people, and he to wonder yet again at the ridiculously simple and easy course they had traversed so far. As he turned towards the small camp they had set up, he noticed the storm clouds over the tops of the mountains to the East, and was grateful that their route did not take them that way. He heard the distant roll of thunder as bright flashes began to light up the darkening sky.

Several of his team were sitting in quiet contemplation, while others were taking the opportunity to meditate, and Spock decided to join them. He was content as he settled himself down onto the hard ground. If only his Human shipmates could be so quietly efficient. Each Vulcan carried out his assigned task with no prompting from him. However, he also had to admit that equally there was none of the easy comradeship either, and in the privacy of his own thoughts Spock knew that he missed the Humans, even the good doctor - but it would never do to let him realise that, of course.

As he began to enter the first level of meditation, his peace was shattered as a searing pain suddenly burned across his chest, arm and leg. Instinctively he knew that the injuries were not his, but Kirk's - Jim was hurt... badly.

"Are you all right, sir?" T'Shal was at his shoulder, her beautiful face expressionless like a plaster doll. Funny... he had never considered his races's non-emotionalism in that light before...

"Perfectly, thank you, Healer." He got lightly to his feet; the inner tranquillity so necessary for even the first level of meditation was gone, shattered, and would not return now.

"You cried out," T'Shal explained, a slight note of query in her voice.

"I did?" He could not hide his own surprise, yet neither could he explain to anyone, even this Healer, the close affinity with his Captain that had grown up over the years and allowed him not only to know, but to feel his friend's pain - and sometimes, though not so intensely, his joy.

His greatest surprise was that the pain was not subsiding, and he wondered why McCoy had not administered a painkiller. After all, they had abundant medical supplies themselves - the Humans must, also.

* * *

Kirk lay where he had fallen. The whole of his left side felt on fire, he knew his arm was broken from the unnatural way it lay, his shoulder too was obviously dislocated, and he probably had a couple of busted ribs. He bit his lip in frustration at his bad luck, then stifled a yelp of pain as he tried to move his left leg; it too was badly damaged, possibly fractured. What a hell of a state to be in! He cursed his own stupidity, even as he acknowledged that he should have expected something like this, considering the weather conditions. If he were totally honest, he had expected it.

"Jim, are you okay?" He could hear the note of worry in the doctor's voice.

"No. I'm pretty smashed up," Kirk admitted honestly. It was no good to pretend otherwise.

"Captain, can you tie the rope around you? We can haul you up." Scotty's anxious voice drifted down, though Kirk could see nothing through the now driving rain.

"I'll try."

It was some time before he could get the rope attached safely and in such a manner that it wouldn't make his injuries worse; but he still passed out again from the pain as his crew hauled him up to comparative safety.

McCoy finished his examination, grim-faced. "There's nothing here I can give you, dammit!"

Kirk bit his lip, then managed a slight smile as he said intuitively, "Bones, stop blaming yourself. Any one of us could have dropped that communicator."

The blue eyes thanked him, although the doctor was silent as he bound Kirk's broken limbs as best he could. "We're going to have to carry you, Jim," he said at last.

"Where to?" Kirk lowered his voice. "I can't see any of us going very far, Bones - certainly not carrying me."

The Chief Engineer came to crouch beside him as another clap of thunder echoed through the mountains, and the storm grew in intensity, the flashes of lightning showing the Humans huddled together on the bleak rock.

"Captain, I'm sorry to worry you, but what do you think we can do?" As always in times of crisis, Scotty's voice seemed to lose all trace of his accent.

"We can't go on, Scotty - not like this. We're going to have to concede," Kirk said.

"Aye, ye're right, of course," he sighed in agreement. "Only trouble is, we've no communicator now, so how do we concede, laddie?"

Kirk shook his head sadly. "Search me." He waited until the next clap of thunder had rolled away, then went on, "We're never going to get across that ravine with the equipment we've got and in this weather."

"Aye, we're not Vulcans, that's for sure."

Kirk grinned. "More's the pity... The only thing we can do is go back. It's closer, and at least we've been over the terrain before."

"That's all very well, Jim, but we've nothing we can make a litter from," McCoy interrupted. "We'll have to carry you in turn, and..."

"No!" Kirk snapped. "You're never going to make it with me along, and I'm in no condition to get down that mountain again."



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"But..." Scott began.

"But nothing, Mr. Scott. You're all going back as fast as you can make it. You can send out help for me from the Base."

"Captain!"

"That's an order, Mr. Scott. You too, Bones."

"Aye, sir."

"I'll be staying with you, Jim," McCoy said. He'd listened in an unusual silence, and Kirk could recognise the signs of guilt still showing on his friend's face.

"Bones, there is absolutely nothing you can do here that you haven't already done... but what if there are more accidents on the way back, and no doctor? Huh?"

McCoy looked uncertain. He knew basically that Kirk was right, but he didn't want to admit it, least of all to himself. He felt responsible for their present situation, and God alone knew what Spock would think about it! Oh, he wouldn't say too much, but McCoy had learned to read the expressionless face, and the Vulcan could convey more feeling with the twitch of an eyebrow or facial muscle than any other man he knew.

"Bones... face facts," Kirk said softly.

The doctor nodded. "But I don't have to like it, Jim."

"Noted." Kirk patted his knee with his good hand. "Now I suggest the two of you get the others on their feet before we all get bogged down here."

Kirk tried to keep a cheerful face on it while he watched the others get to their weary feet and begin to pick up their inadequate equipment. He cursed all bureaucrats for the shambles they now found themselves in. God alone knew how Spock was getting on! But he dare not start to worry about him too - not yet.

Kirk huddled closer to the large rock and pulled the plastic sheeting which was his only cover further over his head. He waved cheerily to the last of his crew as they disappeared in the pouring rain, then sighing he closed his eyes against the flashes of lightning. He had taken the opportunity to read as much as he could about this planet before they had arrived - he always liked to be as well prepared as possible - and was grateful that his crew were obviously not so well-read, for he knew that these electrical storms in the mountains often turned to blizzards as the temperature dropped at night, and no-one with such meagre survival equipment could hope to live in such conditions. If they had known, Scotty or McCoy would have insisted on staying with him, and would have died needlessly too. It was one small crumb of consolation to which to cling. He only hoped that Spock was faring better than they were.

* * *

The Vulcans arrived back at the Base several hours before they were expected and were sked to wait for their debriefing as the Admiral's staff were not expected back on duty for several hours, only the usual night emergency crew being on watch.

"Commander, you have excelled yourself," the Admiral beamed. "I never expected you to complete the course as quickly as this."

Spock nodded. "I take it that Captain Kirk's team are not back yet?"

"No - it seems you're the outright winners," the Admiral beamed.

Spock knew that Kirk was badly injured, and still in extreme pain, but he had hoped that the Humans were back at the Base already. He really could not understand why McCoy had not given the Captain a painkiller.

Spock entered the Waiting Lounge deep in thought. The other members of

his team were all quietly occupied as he had expected, and he walked to the large picture window to stare at the distant mountains. The storm was still raging, and he knew it was only a matter of time before there were blizzard conditions up in the mountains. He was only pleased that neither team had had to take that route; after all, if their route was so easy, then the Humans must have met with something totally unexpected to hold them up for this length of time. Possibly having to carry Kirk, or some other members of their team, accounted for the delay.

It was several hours later before the Admiral's staff arrived back on duty and began the debriefing. Spock sat down as requested, and began to give an accurate and concise account of their journey, but stopped as he saw the Lieutenant look at him oddly.

"I'm sorry, Commander Spock - would you repeat that?"

An eyebrow rose at the odd request - what he had said was all being recorded, after all - but Spock duly obliged.

"I'm... er... I'm sorry, sir, would you excuse me for a moment?" The young Human scraped back his chair and edged towards the door. "I'll be right back, Commander." The door closed behind him...

* * *

Spock stared at the Admiral, schooling his face not to betray his inner turmoil. "How did it happen, sir?" he asked, and was surprised at the calmness of his own voice.

"I really and truly don't know, Commander, but be assured I will find out. Heads will roll for this," the Andorian assured him as the door opened.

"Sorry to interrupt, sir, but I thought you'd want to know right away. Captain Kirk's party are back. You did say to let you know," the pretty brunette said.

"Z'Hai tu Sainhgz!" The Andorian snapped with obvious feeling, then he smiled at the Vulcan. "I'm sorry - I am just relieved that our mistake hasn't caused too much trouble."

Spock turned to the pretty Yeoman. "How is Captain Kirk?" He had to know about those injuries.

The Yeoman blushed and spoke to the Admiral. "You didn't give me time to finish, sir. Captain Kirk's party is back, but he's not with it."

"Not with them? Why not?" the Admiral demanded, before Spock could ask.

"Well... er... it wasn't just the routes that got mixed up, sir," she stammered. "The... er... the medical supplies and all the other equipment... they were..." She looked across at the Vulcan apologetically. "They got your supplies, Commander Spock, and you got theirs. Vulcans don't need painkillers and things, not like Humans do," she said lamely.

The Admiral turned to Spock. "Didn't it strike you as odd that you had so much unnecessary equipment?" he asked.

"I assumed that we were given the supplies to carry so that we would not have an unfair advantage," Spock admitted.

"It seems you assumed wrongly."

"Indeed. However, I must ascertain where Captain Kirk is now. Where are the others, Yeoman?"

"I'll show you, sir. With your permission, Admiral?"

The Andorian nodded, his antennae almost dancing with obvious worry. "Commander." Spock turned at the door. "I will order a rescue party at once."

Spock nodded once, and followed the Yeoman out.

* * *

"Thank heavens you're here, Spock! Jim made us leave him behind," McCoy said as soon as he saw the familiar face.

"You left him where, Doctor?"

"On the top of that blasted mountain! And he's got a broken arm, leg, ribs... He's in no fit state to spend much time up there."

"Indeed. It is a pity you had no emergency communicator with you," Spock said as he estimated how long it would take to reach his friend.

McCoy looked uncomfortable. "We... er... we had a communicator," he mumbled.

"You had one, Doctor?" The dark eyes bored into his. "Why, then, was it not used?" An eyebrow rose.

"I lost it."

The eyebrow rose further.

"I SAID I LOST IT!" McCoy almost shouted.

"I heard you the first time, Doctor," the quiet voice informed him. The Vulcan turned to leave, then said, "I will not ask how you managed to accomplish such a feat."

McCoy's temper, already frayed, flared yet again, as much at himself as at the Vulcan. "I didn't do it on purpose, you sarcastic, overgrown..." His voice tailed off as the door closed behind the lean figure, and the doctor had to run to catch him up.

"Spock, there's a rescue party taking off in less than an hour."

"I know."

The doctor rubbed his hand wearily over his eyes. "I don't see why we can't use the ship's sensors. We know more or less where he is..."

"The electrical storm makes the use of the Enterprise instruments, and those of the Base, useless," Spock replied automatically, without stopping what he was doing.

"I suppose you're going with the rescue party, Spock?"

"No."

"No?" The blue eyes widened in surprise. "Whyever not? It's not because Jim ran off at the mouth a bit before we left, is it?" he demanded.

The Vulcan turned slowly to stare at the Human coldly.

"No, I didn't think it was," the doctor murmured.

"I shall not be going with the official party, Doctor, because I am leaving right away," Spock said quietly.

"That's madness!" McCoy caught his arm, now alarmed. "You don't know what the conditions are like up there. You've got to wait for the others - you'd never make it alone."

"No?" The dark eyes almost danced with suppressed amusement.

"Hell, Spock, I know you think you're Superman," McCoy said, "and I'll admit, if you like, that you'd stand a far better chance than any of us out there, but even you can't get him back alone."

"I have no intention of doing so," Spock replied. "I am taking urgently needed medication for the Captain's injuries, including painkillers, and also survival equipment to combat the exposure he has been subjected to. We will then wait for the main party to arrive."

"That's just it, Spock." The doctor's voice dropped lower. "He must have gone into shock by now, and there's no cover up there at all, so he's suffering from exposure already. He could be dead."

"No. He is not." Spock didn't say that he knew for certain that Kirk still lived.

"Spock, I don't want to admit it either. But we've got to face facts."

"That is precisely what I am doing, Doctor. Now if you will please stand aside, I must be on my way. Time is of the essence."

"Okay, have it your way, but I'm going with you."

The Vulcan turned, his exasperation dissipating at once as he saw the expression on the older man's face. He grasped the slim shoulders, and his dark eyes looked down intensely into the blue ones. "Alone, I have a slim chance to reach the Captain in time... with you, I have none. Please, Bones, for once accept the logic of the situation."

McCot stared back for the space of two heartbeats; for the second time that day he had had to make a decision he didn't like. He nodded quickly in assent, too choked with emotion to reply verbally. The firm hands fell from his shoulders as Spock inclined his own head in understanding and thanks, then strode quickly from the room.

* * *

Kirk turned slowly and tried to rub life into his stiffened body, wincing in pain as he jarred his broken limbs. Cursing, he pulled the simple plastic cover over his head and shoulders again. The snow had finally come, and was already dusting his face and hair before he was able to cover them again. He sat for what seemed hours just staring into the swirling white snow until he realised with dismay that he was falling asleep. Biting his lip, Kirk touched his broken arm to wake himself up, cursing profusely at the self-inflicted pain; but he knew that if he slept now it would be for the last time. He wondered yet again if his people had got back yet, and whether Spock and his team were safe too... Hell, but if the route they'd had to follow was anything to go by... he was frightened even to contemplate how bad theirs was!

He wished desperately that he had been able to speak to the Vulcan just one last time. There was so much, so many things, that needed to be said; now, he had a feeling it was going to be too late. He smiled grimly - it was no good pretending or fooling himself any longer. Strange... of all the places he would have expected to die, stuck up here with a broken leg and arm on top of a windswept, snow-covered mountain, and on a simple - or what should have been a simple - survival test, was certainly not one of them.

Surprised, he felt the sudden warmth creep over him; perhaps the temperature was rising, although his eyes belied the thought. But he felt so very, very tired... perhaps if he closed his eyes for just a moment...

Gently his head fell to one side as his eyes fluttered shut, and he slept.

* * *

As the Vulcan clambered up the now-treacherous mountain side, he felt that something was wrong; then he realised what it was - the pain had gone. Yet how could that be? The other rescue party could not have reached the Human... An icy hand clutched his heart as he realised there was only one explanation - his friend had gone to sleep. If he were dead, Spock knew that he would have known without a doubt; but to sleep in these conditions could have no other end. Kaiidh, but he must hurry...

As it was he very nearly fell over the snow-covered mound that was his Captain's body, and as quickly as his numbed fingers would allow, he activated the insulated survival envelope; knocking the loose snow from Kirk's face and clothes, he began to drag the near-lifeless Human under cover.

"Captain! Jim! Answer me!" He slapped the cold face in desperation, seeing the imprint left on the pale skin by his fingers. Fiercely he caught the broad shoulders in his hands and shook him almost angrily.

"Jim, answer me NOW!"

"Okay, okay... there's no need to break my other arm, too," the familiar voice chided softly, and Spock felt his own limbs go weak with relief; but he quickly schooled his features back to normal.

"My apologies, Captain. I did not mean..."

"Forget it, Spock. How the hell did you get here?" Kirk watched as the deft fingers prepared a hypo and pressured it into his shoulder.

"That will relieve the pain, but it will not make you sleep."

"Yeah, I almost went to sleep, didn't I?" Kirk asked, and the dark head nodded agreement. "That's what I figured. And you haven't told me yet how the hell you got here so quickly."

"We arrived back early, I learned from the doctor what had happened, and decided that alone I could reach you well before the rescue party." The dark eyes glinted with sudden amusement. "I thought you might like the company."

Kirk managed a rueful smile. "You manage to say the most illogical things at times, Commander. However..." he sighed loudly, "... it seems I must eat humble pie - again."

"Humble pie, sir?"

"Yeah, you know what I mean. All that crap about my beating the pants off you and the Vallorian crew! Have I got egg on my face!" He touched the thin arm with his uninjured hand. "I'm sorry."

"Captain..." The Vulcan looked decidedly uncomfortable; he knew Humans had this emotional need to express their feelings, but he still didn't like it. "There is no reason you should feel it necessary to apologise to me."

As Kirk opened his mouth to dispute his assertion, the Vulcan waved him to silence, but Kirk was stubborn too, and continued to speak.

"No reason, Spock? Hell, we complete less than half the course... and... and I get myself in a state like this. I have to concede the test and send my party back alone with their tails between their legs. Then to top it all, you finish the course earlier than expected, and then come up here alone to save my ass yet again! And you say there's no need?" He shook his head ruefully, and then looked up in surprise as two long fingers reached out to touch his lips.

"Shhh... Please, Captain, listen to me. There was an error. I do not know who made it, and it matters not who was to blame - the outcome could have been fatal." He saw he had Kirk's undivided attention, so went on, "You were given the course meant for us, Captain, and we were given the reverse. Also the medical supplies and equipment were distributed wrongly. To have got this far, in the time allotted, with that equipment and under these conditions, is no small feat."

"Indeed?" Kirk grinned - he sounded just like his First Officer. McCoy was right - it did rub off on you after a while. "I will admit, it explains a lot, Mr. Spock. You know, the worst part was I felt so damn useless, especially after all my big talk." He smiled at the familiar face. "Look, I don't want to embarrass you, but I must say this..."

"Captain, there is no need."

"But there is a need, Spock. Mine. For my own peace of mind, hear me out, okay?"

Spock was silent, and taking that for acquiescence, Kirk moved to a more comfortable position and then continued, after wincing slightly.

"I guess over the years I've come to rely on you, Spock." He paused. He'd wanted this time to say some of the things he'd never had time for before. Okay, now he had it, was he going to chicken out again? He squared his shoulders as

best he could, took a deep breath, then smiled.

"When you're on hand, then, hell, I know I can do it... that we can do it... anything! Does that make any sort of sense to you? 'Cause it damn well doesn't to me, but I've given up trying to analyse the whys and wherefores, the reasons why... I just accept it now - completely."

The dark eyes were staring at him out of a totally expressionless face.

//Hell, now I've really embarrassed the poor devil!//

"I... er... I just wanted you to know that you're... well... you are appreciated, Spock, even if I do run off at the lip sometimes."

The stern face broke into a slight smile. "If I did not know that, Jim, do you honestly think I would stay?"

The hazel eyes opened wide with surprise. Now was the time to say it.

"Spock... I..."

"Hey, is this an exclusive party, or can anyone join in? How are you feeling, Jim?" McCoy's cheery face appeared between them.

The Vulcan turned. "Really, Doctor, it should be obvious even to you that the Captain is not feeling well," he said stiffly.

"Of course I know he's not well, Spock!" McCoy snapped in retaliation. "I'm a doctor, dammit, and that's my best bedside manner!"

"Indeed?" The deep voice dripped sarcasm.

Kirk lay back and closed his eyes, listening to his friends' arguments. A smile played around his lips, and he sighed quietly. Some things, after all, are better left unsaid.

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BONDED

If you call, without sound I shall hear you
 Though you may be a light year away.
 I shall come without quibble or question
 Or anyone's say.

It may be death or disaster
 That I find on some distant star,
 But if I can help you, I care not
 What horrors or dangers there are.

Though all the powers in Starfleet
 Forbid, I shall come to your call;
 This bond will hold though the galaxy end
 And eternal darkness fall.

Monica Burnett

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PARTINGS

by

Valerie Piacentini

No explanation has been offered, and she knows better than to ask for one. She can tell by the slight frown on her husband's face that he too is puzzled - and concerned. Their eyes meet, and he allows her to see the uncertainty, to share the waiting. She knows that his thoughts, as hers, are with the man who sleeps in the room overhead. There will be an explanation - of sorts - in the morning, and with it another parting. How many have there been over the years? And each one with its own memories, joy, pain and pride hopelessly mingled... a storm of forbidden emotion.

The first time - so long ago now, it seems - brought the special heartache of a mother who must watch her son sever the ties of childhood. Such a small, solemn-eyed child, stiff-lipped with the effort not to cry. The formal parting was still to come, downstairs, with the family watching; but her husband had offered this moment of privacy. A gift of love indeed, for he understood that both mother and child needed this last expression of tenderness. Somehow she found the courage to smile at her son proudly, and had her reward in the glow of unspoken affection in the dark eyes. He came forward, winding his thin arms around her neck, and as she hugged the small body close she knew it was for the last time. She kissed him, smoothed the dark hair, then with more courage than she had known she possessed, drew back to fix in her mind this picture of her son, clad for the journey in a desert suit of soft leather. Such determination! Even T'Pau had offered to postpone the Kahs-wan for a year, as had been done for his cousin Storm, but he would have none of it. Her fears vanished as she met his determined eyes. He would not fail.

The next parting had been harder. Even after all these years she could recall the anguish of that whispered conversation in the cool shade of her garden. Her husband, although he had turned from his son, understood his wife well; he would not demand that she too part from their child with cold formality, and had told her that although he would not see the boy again until he repented of his error, he would not forbid her to send or receive messages. It was unheard-of for a son to defy his father... but the boy was not Vulcan - not fully. Why did her husband find that so hard to understand? She was torn between them, her love for them both pulling her this way and that. The boy had struggled for years to satisfy his father's expectations, to win his approval; but his Human needs had grown stronger, the stars had called, and the rigid tradition of Vulcan had stifled his soaring spirit. Realising that, he had pleaded for his father's consent - and had been refused. He had answered his call; the resulting breach had been deep, and left bitter memories. She had lost her son to Starfleet, not knowing if she would ever see him again; but being Human - and so illogical - she had clung to hope.

That hope, thin though it grew with the years, had been fulfilled at last during the trip to Babel. There had been the joy of seeing her husband and son reconciled. Her fear for their lives had vanished in the pleasure of watching the dark heads inclined together as they spoke of eighteen lost years. When they reached Vulcan on the return leg of their journey she had stood with her husband in the transporter room and watched as her son moved to his place at his Captain's side. The hazel eyes had smiled an affectionate welcome, and gratitude had rendered her voice husky as she bade farewell to the proven friend who had held out his hand to ease her son's loneliness. Watching them together, she knew that each filled a need for the other. Two men, both set a little apart, one by his heritage, the other by his command, they had found or made a friendship that broke all barriers. It had been a happy parting, for it held the promise of reunion; the tears that shone in her eyes as she stepped once more onto the surface of her adopted planet had been tears of thankfulness; - all

was well with her son.

But two years ago the tears had been those of loss and sorrow. The icy-eyed stranger who had spoken the ritual words renouncing his home and family could surely have none of her Human frailty in his passionless heart. Why he had chosen the path of Kolinahr, she had never learned; perhaps it had something to do with the announcement, shortly afterwards, of the newly-promoted Admiral who had been appointed Chief of Starfleet Operations. She had not dared to ask. He had turned his back and walked away, a tall, too-thin figure in the robes of an Aspirant of Gol, and his step had not faltered, he had not once looked back for a last sight of his home and parents. She had watched with blurred eyes until a turn of the path took him out of sight, then clinging to her husband's arm she had gone back into the empty house, gathering all her courage to face the years ahead. Her husband's eyes had mirrored her own grief; it had been hard for him to lose again the son so recently found. As he had... for no family ties, no affection, no memories could bind an initiate of Kolinahr. Husband and wife stood face to face, knowing that the son they both loved had left their home and lives for ever.

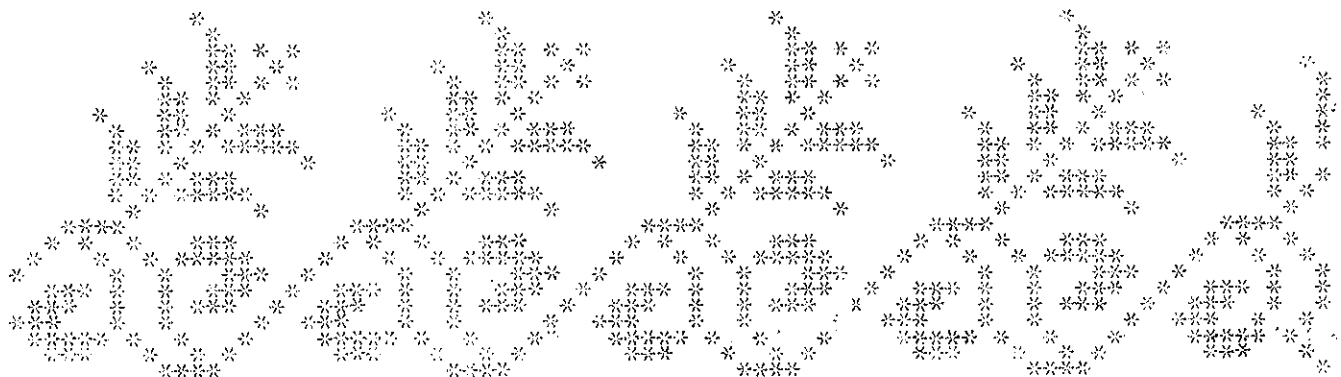
For two years there had been no word. Then, only hours ago, a dust-covered figure, long hair veiling a face lined with anxiety and suffering, robes stained and tattered, had walked quietly through the door. His voice harsh with worry, he had asked for help - the use of a diplomatic shuttle, and immediate clearance to leave Vulcan. With an effort they had restrained themselves from asking questions, and pausing only to give him a quiet welcome, they had done as he asked. Her husband had left immediately to arrange for the ship, she had busied herself preparing food and clothes. Her reward had been the hesitant gratitude in the dark eyes. For them both, he had said all that was necessary.

"I have refused Kolinahr."

"My t'hy'la has need of me."

Refused Kolinahr? She had felt the shock that rocked her husband. Many had failed the harsh discipline - it was no disgrace - but never, in all Vulcan's long history, had initiation been refused by one who had achieved acceptance by the Masters. Yet the reason was there, in his own words, and it was enough. He was needed. Nothing, not even Kolinahr, could stand before the claims of a t'hy'la. Tomorrow he would return to the companion who had called him back. Perhaps she would see him again, perhaps not, but that call had freed him, finally and forever, from the chains that had bound his spirit to Gol. Whatever the future held for him, she was grateful for that.

Across the room she meets her husband's eyes, and she can tell that his thoughts and hers have followed the same path. Tomorrow they will stand together and give their son to the future. There will be another parting - but this time it will be of his own choosing... and with their blessing.





A CHIP IN TIME SAVES AN OFFICER OF THE LINE

by

Lesley Walker



There comes a time in everyone's life when they suddenly realize that they are no longer an adolescent, but a full-grown adult with all the responsibilities and problems attached. I finally reached that stage a few weeks ago when I found myself in a real senior position for the first time in my Fleet career. It's interesting, so I may as well tell you about it...

All Human beings need a rest now and again; Lt. Uhura is no exception, and along with four other weary Enterprise crew members, decided to take a couple of weeks of her vast amount of accumulated leave on the Starbase in our patrol area. This meant, of course, as the next senior officer in line, that it was my turn on the Bridge.

By now, I had got over my phobia of gold shirts, gold braid, Starship Captains, etc., and was able to control my nervous system for a sufficiently long period to enable me to carry out my duty. It was a couple of hours before I was due on watch, and as I am quite friendly with Uhura, I decided to see her off - well, at least as far as the transporter room.

It was quite exciting just to be able to walk into the transporter room, as I never really get a chance to go in there, except maybe to fix the occasional communications malfunction, which happens very infrequently, since Mr. Spock or Mr. Scott are usually there on the spot and really would not appreciate the interference of such a minion as myself.

As I walked in, I must confess I felt a rush of excitement looking at the transporter pads - I know, what a stupid thing to get excited about, but as I say, it is all still new to me, and I haven't had the chance to let the novelty wear off yet...

Uhura, a couple of guys from Security, and two nurses from Medical were standing in front of the pads, busily chattering among themselves, with the excited child-like voices people seem to have before they go on holiday. They all had small carry-alls in tow, and were all in casual, off-duty clothing. Uhura, even in a maroon all-in-one, still looked dressed to kill (some people have the knack, and some people are like me - sacks of potatoes tied up with string in the middle) and was chatting to one of the nurses. She spotted me, and waved me over.

"Hi!" she beamed enthusiastically. "Looking forward to your first real stint of Bridge duty?"

"Ask me in two weeks time."

"Pessimist!! You should be looking forward to all those exciting jobs, all those unexpected incidents..."

"All those times when I have to say, 'Hailing frequencies are jammed, sir!'"

She giggled. "I know what you mean. Routine is the best cure for aspiring Communications Officers. Still, at least I'll be away from all that for a few, blissfully carefree weeks... By the way, I've left a couple of tapes in the Comms. console with all the boring - I mean, repetitive - things that might crop up. I thought you might like a few guides just in case you forget everything as soon as El Captain walks onto the Bridge..."

"Now just a minute!!" I was blushing from head to foot and couldn't think of a suitable retort. Uhura knew me inside out. As far as Starship Captain James Kirk was concerned, I was a ninny with no Officer experience - loads of potential, but just a fool when unnerved, which seemed to happen every time I met the Captain. It's a vicious circle...

Uhura nudged me in the ribs. "Don't take life so seriously! I agree, it's a responsible job, but you've had the training, you know the equipment and all you need now is the experience, which you are going to get a lot of in the next fourteen days, believe me!"

"Thanks, Uhura. I tend to get a bit jumpy and forget that I can actually do the job - I guess I worry too much..."

Mr. Kyle came in through the transporter room doors at that moment, and I guessed it was about time for Uhura to go.

"Oh dear, I think I'm going to have to leave pretty soon. Are you going to be able to cope while I'm away?"

"I can only do my best, Uhura. Anyway, you lucky thing, go off and enjoy yourself and have a good rest. And don't have too much fun - I don't want to be bored to death over the next ten months with stories of all the men you met, all the places you visited, blah, blah, blah..."

"Jealousy is most unbecoming, Lee!"

"Yeah, but I'm afraid I'm suffering from a large dose of it at the moment!"

I looked around, and the others were all moving towards the pads. I flung my arm around Uhura's shoulder, and I could feel a lump in my throat.

"I'm not going to be away forever, you know!" She squeezed me and patted me on the back.

"Take care, Uhura," I managed to croak, "and send me a Stargram or something."

"Take care of yourself, Lee, and have faith!! Listen, I really have to go... Don't worry, you'll be just fine, you wait and see!" With that she stepped on the pad, and gave me a last wave.

"Everybody ready?" asked Mr. Kyle, and off they went in a shimmer of light.

I stood looking at the empty pads for a moment, still getting over the wonderment of the transporter effect, turned and looked at Kyle and then left for my quarters, readying myself for my first duty watch.

* * *

After three cups of coffee and two huge black cherry Danish pastries (my own personal anti-depressant remedy), I pulled myself together and made a move towards the Bridge. As usual, the turbolift deposited me at the Bridge before I was suitably composed, and I was in the middle of picking off some icing sugar from the pastries (I always manage to drop some right in the middle of my tunic - such a messy, unkempt person) when, of course, the doors flew apart and there was Mr. Spock at the Comms. console. I looked up, caught right in the act, and feeling a teeny-weeny bit ashamed. Mr. Spock retained his usual ice-cold composure, and left the Comms. console, heading towards me.

"Lt. Sawyer reporting for duty, sir."

"Very good, Lieutenant, please proceed."

I shuffled over to the console, consciously digging away at the small white stain on my tunic. I managed to slide into my seat without too much ado, feeling a little strange sitting in the seat where my adept companion usually sat, and placed my hands out in front of me over the board. I took a long deep breath, picked up the audio device, and inserted it in my ear. I began the routine checks, 'snooping' (as it is known in the trade) on inter-ship communications to ensure that all channels were operative, and began the routine space messages to local stations, checking my sub-space frequencies.

My duty watch continued much the same for several hours, with constant checks and re-checks, transmitting the odd occasional message, trying not to get hypnotised by the light, and all the time attempting to stay alert; keeping my ears open, in other words.

Spock's duty watch came to an end, and Mr. Sulu took over. I still had a few hours to go, and boy, was I bored!

I was just about to give up hope when my ears were blown off by a brain-searing screech through the audio device. I was surprised that I didn't black out at that point, and had the sense to remove the offending instrument from my ear. In an instant, I noticed the board indicator lights showed that a powerful signal was coming through on at least four different frequencies, and suddenly, I became a Communications Officer.

"Mr. Sulu!! Signal coming through - point of origin unknown, but am asking the computer to verify."

"Put it on audio, please, Miss Sawyer."

I flicked over the Bridge audio receiver, and a deafening, resonant boom hit the Bridge. My volume control was switched to the minus area, but still the sound was ear-splitting. However, it had formed itself into a regular beat, and was becoming coherent, and could be described as some kind of voice. The voice spoke, and I turned to rock in my boots.

"WHO ARE YOU???" demanded the Voice. "WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE HERE? YOU ARE INTRUDERS, YOU ARE NOT WELCOME. STATE YOUR MISSION AND VACATE THIS AREA IMMEDIATELY, OR YOU WILL BE DESTROYED."

Sulu was bolt upright in the Captain's chair. He turned to me. "I think the Captain should hear this - please alert him."

"Aye aye, sir."

Sulu turned back to the viewscreen, which showed only starfield and black, and spoke to the disembodied Voice.

"We are the Starship Enterprise. Our mission here is a peaceful one - we mean you no harm. Who are you, please?"

"THAT IS NOT IMPORTANT AT THIS STAGE. I AM AUTHORISED BY THE GOVERNING BODIES OF THIS SECTOR TO SEIZE YOUR CRAFT AND INTERROGATE ITS COMMANDER. DO YOU COMPLY?"

"Er... yes, we comply. Our Commander has been notified, and is on his way to the Bridge now; I am sure you will find that it is not necessary to seize our ship..."

"THAT WILL BE DECIDED WHEN YOUR COMMANDER IS PRESENT."

"All right, Sulu, I'll take over now."

Captain Kirk came striding onto the Bridge, Sulu eagerly vacating his seat and returning to his navigation console.

"This is Captain James T. Kirk, Commander of the USS Enterprise. Please identify yourself and state your purpose."

The Voice was silent. Captain Kirk turned to me.

"Any luck on tracing that Voice yet, Lieutenant?"

"Aye, sir. Computer reports point of origin as Vector Two of this quadrant, sir, and it seems to be emanating from the satellite of a small Class M planet in that region. I have fed the coordinates into Navigation, sir."

"Good girl, Lieutenant. Sulu, get on with it, will you, and plot us a course..."

"PROCEED NO FURTHER, CAPTAIN KIRK!!! YOUR VESSEL WILL BE DESTROYED SHOULD YOU ATTEMPT TO INTERFERE ANY FURTHER."

"Interfere? I don't understand. Can you please qualify your statement?"

"DON'T DENY YOUR GUILT, EARTHMAN!!!"

"How do you know we are from Earth?"

"IT IS ENOUGH THAT WE KNOW WHERE YOU ARE FROM. YOU AND YOUR KIND ARE A BLIGHT ON THE UNIVERSE, AND WE WISH NO FURTHER INTERFERENCE FROM YOU!! YOU CONTAMINATE THE VERY FABRIC OF SPACE BY YOUR PRESENCE!! RETURN TO YOUR HOMES, AND NEVER ENTER OUR SPACE AGAIN!!"

"Lieutenant Sawyer, can you please check with Starbase on this quadrant? I was damned sure Starfleet wouldn't have put a Starbase slap in the middle of a no-go area, and the last time we patrolled this area there was no reported belligerency. I want to know why we suddenly have an anti-Earth unit based in Earth space, and so close to home."

"Aye aye, sir." (Sometimes I feel like a parrot, but still...)

The booming Voice continued with its threats of death and destruction as I contacted Starbase. I half-expected to hear Uhura (she's a workaholic), but I checked up on the data as requested, and found that our area had been patrolled six months previously and found to be absolutely baddie-free. This villain was a recent addition, then...

Kirk and the Voice continued a to-and-fro of various accusations, denials, counter-denials, etcetera, and I managed to see the Captain in top form as a diplomat. Not once did he call the Voice a liar - at least, not openly - and he managed to imply subtly that the Voice was indeed the intruder and not the Enterprise - as indeed it was.

Finally, the Voice agreed to allow the Enterprise to come and see its accuser in person, although the Voice still had not identified itself. Such is the subtle way a fish gets hooked on the line - it never knows who is on the other end of the fishing pole. (So much for my one-credit philosophy...)

We followed the course given us by the Voice, and finally came to orbit status around a small, unobtrusive-looking satellite, about the same size as (if not smaller than) Earth's moon (according to my computer readout). Captain Kirk called for a landing party, which consisted of himself, Mr. Spock, and two Security guards (my old friend Andy West was one of them, and the other a veteran, Saul Josephs). The satellite was checked out to have 90% Earth gravity and a breathable oxygen atmosphere, and it was decided, finally, to check out its possible hostility.

The Voice came back, as if on cue, just as the Captain was about to leave for the transporter room.

CAPTAIN KIRK!!" it boomed. "YOUR LIFE AND THE LIVES OF YOUR FELLOW SHORE PARTY MEMBERS ARE ALL SUBJECT TO THE DISCRETION OF THE INHABITANTS OF THIS WORLD YOU ARE ABOUT TO VISIT. YOU WOULD BE WISE TO BEAR THIS IN MIND, AND ATTEMPT TO CONTROL YOUR ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR TO A CIVILISED LEVEL OF ACCEPTANCE."

Kirk harrumphed loudly and turned to acknowledge the Voice. "I - ah - think I can safely vouch for the conduct of all members of the shore party, but would you at least have the decency to inform me with whom I will be conversing?"

The Voice halted. "YOUR HOST WILL BE THE GREAT LORD VE'STON, RULER OF THE WORLD OF..."

The name was untranslatable, and I certainly couldn't say it in local dialect. The reference number of the satellite was RK402 - a nondescript name for a nondescript planet.

Captain Kirk continued, "Very well. Please inform Lord - I mean - Great Lord Ve'Ston that we look forward to meeting with him, and hope that we can come to some mutually satisfactory agreement concerning our - ah - differences."

"CAPTAIN KIRK, THE GREAT LORD HAS NO 'DIFFERENCES' AS YOU CALL THEM - EARTHMEN INTERFERE, THAT IS THE TRUTH AND THAT IS OUR POINT OF DISCUSSION. YOU WILL ALSO ENSURE THAT NONE OF YOUR PERSONNEL ARE ARMED OR YOUR LIVES WILL BE FORFEIT."

"Agreed. Our Transporter Chief will select a suitable beam-down point

from the coordinates you have fed into our computer, and we will join you shortly."

"THAT IS SATISFACTORY, EARTHMAN."

"Lieutenant," said Kirk, turning to me, "maintain communications link with the landing party at all times. Advise Mr. Scott of any irregularities should they occur - understood?"

"Aye aye, Captain."

"Mr. Sulu, you have the con."

"Good luck, sir."

Kirk grinned, and left the Bridge.

* * *

Things began to go wrong immediately. The instant the landing party beamed down, I lost all voice contact with them, and could not even follow them using telemetry. A barrier had been deliberately raised between us.

I had a feeling something would go wrong during Uhura's vacation, but to such a wide extent, I would never have imagined. However, after a couple of minutes of acute panic and brain-blanking, I managed to gain control of myself and begin the component-by-component search needed to find a way through the communications barrier. I searched through the computer records, compared them with my updated versions of the Comms. console (Uhura and I had made a few modifications upon the original to improve quality and control), and began the unpleasant job of taking the Comms. console to bits. Mr. Scott was up to his knees in dilithium replacements, so I was on my own - ghaaaasstllllyy.

With my little black pouch, I began to dismember the Comms. console. This was a time when I could use help from Mr. Spock, who was unfortunately otherwise engaged, along with the Captain and two other men. I suddenly realised that it was up to me to save them from a possible and unknown danger. Anyone who erects a comms. barrier has something particularly nasty to hide...

One and a half hours later (despite several frantic messages from Dr. McCoy as to the whereabouts of his two friends) I managed to have surrounded myself with most of the contents of the Comms. console. I found the section I was interested in - right at the back, as usual - succeeded in cutting my fingers to ribbons and also in wiring in an ultra-modern, non-regulation issue component that I had recently discovered in one of my trips through the Galactic Catalogue.

I hauled myself out, dusted off a bit, and switched on the Comms. console (I hope Uhura will forgive me one day for the wreck I made of her beautiful, neat wiring). I did a quick rundown check and re-inserted my audio device. I turned up the volume to full max and began transmitting (hopefully) to the Captain on Code 2.

For a couple of minutes there was an eerie silence on the Bridge, with everyone looking at me or expectantly at the Bridge speaker. Suddenly, in a violent burst of static (my poor little ear drums!!) the Captain's voice broke through.

"Enterprise! Come in, Enterprise! Kirk to Enterprise! Can you hear us?"

"Enterprise to Captain Kirk," I responded for the first time in my life. "We read you loud and clear, sir."

"Sulu, prepare to beam up four immediately - I repeat, immediately! - and get us out of here... fast!!!"

"Aye aye, sir!"

There were smiles all round on the Bridge, and I imagine the Captain himself would have smiled, had he had the time.

About fifteen minutes later, the Captain messaged up to Sulu. "Mr. Sulu, I shall be in my quarters until my next duty watch. Please keep me informed of

any developments." He sounded very much like he expected no developments, so I guess he had a few secrets that he didn't feel obliged to reveal - not yet, anyway.

I sat there in a state of excitement for about two hours, until the Captain began his duty. The doors whooshed open and there he stood, not a hair out of place, beaming all over his face. I think I must have been looking at him expectantly, because he came over to me before he relieved Sulu.

"Lieutenant Sawyer," he said, "I believe you are responsible for re-establishing communications contact?"

"Er... ahem... yes - yes, sir, I... er... did... er - sir."

"Very good, Lieutenant. You proved yourself worthy of your promotion, and of the faith your seniors placed in you. I, too, am extremely grateful to you, as without your help we would undoubtedly have been forced to discover some other, less efficient method of contact. What did you use, by the way, to get through Lord (snigger) Ve'Ston's screen?"

"It's a bit unorthodox, sir; in fact, it's against regulations..."

"Really? But what is it - if you don't mind me asking?"

I paused to clear my throat, and to fold down a flush that I could feel rising from my feet. "It's a new electronic component, sir, for... um... (mutter) purposes, sir..."

"Pardon, Lieutenant? I didn't quite catch that."

"It's... er... um... for use with personal entertainment equipment, sir."

Kirk stepped back, looked at me in a curious way, and spoke. "What kind of personal entertainment, Sawyer?"

"Something I'd rather not talk about, sir, if you don't mind."

"Eh? Oh - oh, I see. Okay, we'll leave it at that. Let's just say that whatever it's for, it sure got up Lord Ve'Ston's audio ducts! Well done, Sawyer - I'll see that this goes on your report."

"Thank you, sir, thank you. May I ask what you found on the satellite, sir, just out of curiosity?"

"No, Lieutenant, you may not. However, I don't think we shall be having any more problems with 'Lord' Ve'Ston again."

"Aye, sir."

(And I bet Andy West has been sworn to secrecy too! Rats, now I'll never know!! Rank hath its privileges, and secrecy is one of them...)

* * *

So, gentlebeings, the rest of Uhura's vacation came and went (she sent me a long, revealing stargram about her exploits on starbase - which, as an officer (ahem) and a lady (guffaw) I am not at liberty to divulge... yet. Just watch this space for my memoirs), and as you can see, I did not die of curiosity. Unfortunately, Captain Kirk never relented to tell the tale of RK402 - neither did Andy West, despite promises of wealth, endless cups of coffee, a night out with Uhura (which she refused to oblige me with - some friend!) or threats to his life.

In the rec. room one day I was sitting down, sipping my coffee and scraping off more Danish pastry goo from my tunic (my brain seems to think my mouth is actually located several feet below its real location) and musing on the possibility of getting into the habit of eating something a bit less viscous, when Uhura came waltzing up, smiling and holding a cup of coffee and a plate full of Danish pastries (oh, what a wicked woman - and me on the verge of giving them up!!)

"Hi, Lee. Can I join you?"

I motioned to the empty seat next to mine. "Sure, help yourself."

"That's just what I was going to say to you. Care for a Danish?"

Sigh. I can't win.

"Thanks. (Snatch, gobble.) What's new with you today?"

"Oh, nothing much. I just wanted to ask you what component you put in the back of my Comms. console while I was away. It boosts all my frequencies way, way up, but with no distortion. I'm dying to know what it is. Go on, tell me."

Oh boy. This is going to be embarrassing.

"Aw come on, Uhura, you don't really want to know. It's not important. Let's just say it's something I found..."

"No, that's not good enough. Come right out and tell me, or I shall tell Andy West you're crazy to go out with him! (Much giggly laughter from Uhura; much frenzied face-pulling and grimacing from me.)

"Oh, all right, then. It's a component that's used in the manufacture of simulated... er, shall we say, android ladies, to amplify the... the... um, well, you know..."

For the first time in my life, I actually witnessed the unlikely event of Uhura blushing.

"Oh, I see. No wonder you didn't want to brag about it! Well, now I know, I don't think I'll be able to press that button again without grinning all over the place!"

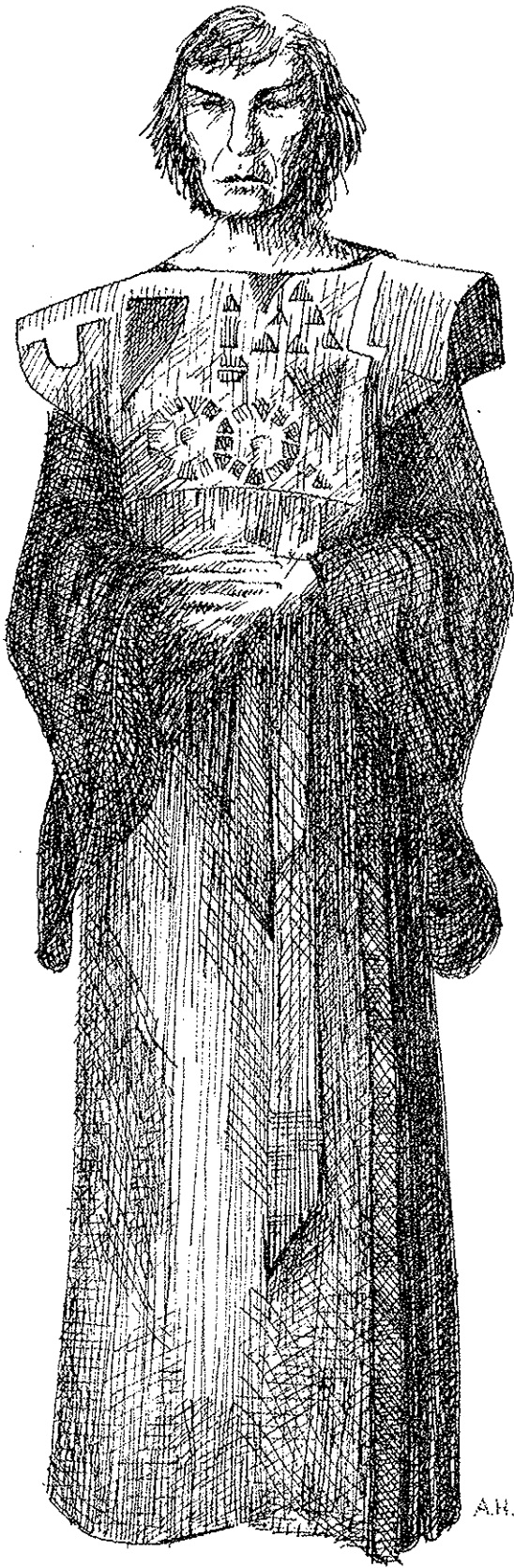
What a relief!! She was still speaking to me!!!

Anyway, folks, I have to run - I have to clean my tunic before I go back on duty!!

BITTER-SWEET

Those well-remembered eyes,
As liquid dark as a bottomless well,
Wishing him long life as he left for Vulcan.
He would never know
How nearly his saddened smile stopped him from leaving.
Maybe with the next time
The pulse of emotion would beat supreme through his blood.
There was always that fear,
Anger upon anger, love upon love, unrestrained.
Such bitter-sweet anguish,
A pain to be cherished
For the friendship contained in a single smile.
Elusive tranquillity, the cut of peace.
Into the rocks and into the sand
Seeps part of another's soul
Forever gone.

Gillian Catchpole.



A.H.

Logic is all.
Here on these burning sands
One must forget all else.

Control is all.
Here on these burning sands
He who has no control is dead.

Detachment is all.
Here on these burning sands
One must remain detached,
Ignoring thirst and hunger,
Ignoring pain -
The pain of sunburned skin,
The pain of many memories...

Logic is all.
Here on these burning sands
There is no other thing
Can ease the pain of loss.
It was so hard
To walk away and leave you...

Control is all!
Here on these burning sands
I must achieve the goal
I set myself -
Controlling those emotions
Bequeathed me by my Human blood.

...Love is all...
No! Never!
Love is pain and worry -
Love is fear.
My own life - that is nothing;
His...
I must control!

Control is all.
Logic is all.
Detachment...
Control...
Logic...

Why is it so hard
To forget his love?

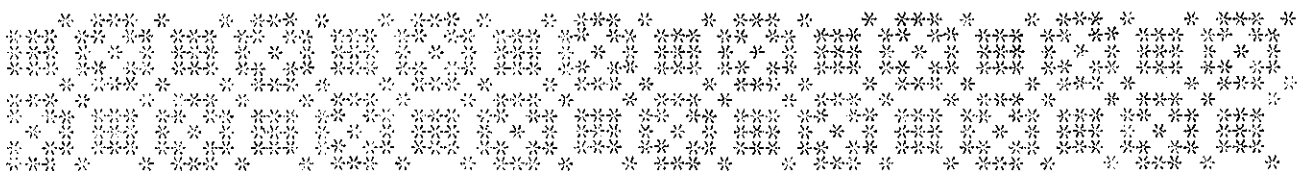
Sheila Clark



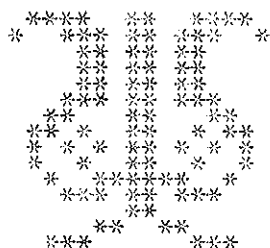
RAINBOWS AROUND THE MOON

Aching weeks of routine,
 Boring our hearts and souls.
 We need so very much to rest... to feel good
 Earth beneath our feet.
 I wish recreation was now in sight, and
 we could deny all of Starfleet's might.
 Just to see...
 Just to breathe...
 Just to drink for a while the wonder
 of planetside life.
 Where seas whisper to the shores,
 Where bright lights are reflected from a distant town,
 Where far-off music would hum around.
 Where on soft grass we could lie down,
 Where we could forget this staleness all too soon...
 Where we could paint rainbows around the moon...

Gladys Oliver



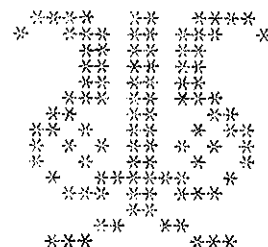




TOO HIGH A PRICE

by

Lee Owers



Kirk eased his arms into the sleeves of the ornate Vulcan ceremonial robe, feeling the heavy folds settle on his shoulders. His hands trembled slightly as he secured the concealed fastenings and smoothed the rich fabric into place.

The robe sighed and whispered in the eerie silence as he walked slowly across the room to stand in front of the great mirror. The soft, erratic glow of the candles caught at the intricate golden chasings, surrounding Kirk's image with a flickering haze of light. No modern forms of lighting were permitted tonight, for tradition must be upheld. He ran a comb swiftly through his hair and stood back from the glass.

The effect was undoubtedly impressive. But for his obviously Human features, Kirk might have been looking back through a hundred years of Vulcan history. The design of the robe was unchanged, but this one - and Spock's own - had been specifically created for the occasion. It was that important.

He stared, unmoving, at his reflection. The light was flattering - and not without need, for it hid the deepening shadows under Kirk's eyes; all but erased the lines of sleeplessness and strain. They were fresh scars, but they had bitten deep.

Kirk sensed, rather than saw, the paling of the pitch black sky of Vulcan. He shivered, his body unwilling to turn and face the dawn. A soft knocking at the door disturbed his vigil, yet he remained by the mirror, reluctant to answer the call for which he had waited all night. He heard the door open and turned slowly around to face his visitor.

Spock stood in the doorway, solemn and somehow... distant; resplendent in the robes which matched Kirk's own.

//As if he had worn them all his life,// Kirk thought. //Already... it begins already, my friend...//

And yet he understood; knew it had to be this way, for both of them. The smile was slow to come, curving gently at the corners of his mouth. It did not reach his eyes.

//But then you understand too, don't you? How it feels for me...//

Spock remained at the door, as if to move into the room might be to cross some unknown threshold and trap them there, unable to complete the task before them; to hold them forever in a stasis of untenable dreams and broken promises. One hand rose slowly and gestured towards the window. Kirk noticed how steady it was and his own fists clenched tight against their shaking.

"We must leave now - the light is growing."

Kirk nodded. There was nothing more to say; no argument which could deter the Vulcan from his purpose - not without asking him to betray the stronger loyalty of blood that he had always maintained.

//And I never wanted you to do that, Spock. Never asked, never would. not even now. I love you more than I have ever loved another friend, but that would be too high a price for you to pay...//

"I'm ready."

He extinguished the candles quickly, efficiently and, without looking back, strode determinedly from the room.

* * *

They left the house behind them, the short procession winding its way through the grounds of Shi-Kahr to the grove. Kirk watched the silent figures

glide along before him into the early morning light. The life and breath and power of Vulcan held in the hands of these few men and women. The destiny of the entire planet and its people was theirs to decide... for as long as they lived. Then the duty would fall to another: the chosen one, sworn to uphold the dearly-won philosophy of Vulcan against the emotional pressure of a thousand other inhabited worlds. The Council. To be selected was the greatest honour a Vulcan could receive and to accept, perhaps the greatest sacrifice one could be asked to give.

Kirk wondered if they knew just how far-reaching their influence was; how many other lives became ensnared by their remorseless intellect and logic, to be drawn along... or cast off. He realised that his presence, too, was an honour. No other outworlder had witnessed an inauguration since they had begun in Surak's time - let alone taken part. His was the role usually assumed by a brother, a bondmate - someone to whom the chosen had given his total trust... his love. Once before, when the understanding between them had been newly forged and full of optimism, Spock had asked Kirk to stand at his side, as his closest friend. Now, that same understanding had been tried and tested more times than Kirk could recall. It had wavered, receded, returned... always growing, changing - as they themselves had grown and changed, until it had become something of steel and ice, hard-fought and full of realism; a second nature neither could explain, nor needed to. They had both believed it was meant to last forever.

Spock was calling on that bond between them now, needing and wanting Kirk to be here...

//Why is it easier to face the fact that you might have to kill a friend that to watch him walk away?//

But Spock had risked so much of his precarious reputation by insisting on Kirk's presence, so that he might be the one to hold the chalice of wine which would seal the pact, mark the end of the ceremony...

//And so much more...//

He followed in Spock's footsteps, tracing their path like an automaton. Unable, or unwilling, to think further than the next stride, the next minute of time, the next breath; schooling his features into the expected impassivity. Gradually, the procession slowed, forming a small circle in the grove. Kirk stood in his appointed place, watching the isolated figure in its centre. The few metres of grass which separated them could have been as many miles.

His grip tightened on the chalice as he willed himself to remain still. The sun rose over the tall blooms of the grove as he heard Spock begin the familiar phrases of High Vulcan which began his initiation into the circle. Phrases which had been burned into Kirk's memory during the last few days.

//Is this why your father couldn't condone your ambitions. Spock? Because he knew that, one day, you could be standing here? And I suppose he was right ... if you had died - out there, with me - you might never have had this chance, never had to make this choice... Yet the irony of it is that it wasn't you who risked your life once too often. It was him...//

Kirk remembered the day the Enterprise had received the news. It was the nearest he had ever seen Spock come to breaking down on the bridge. The message from Vulcan had been brief - and harsh. A malfunction on the diplomatic shuttle carrying Sarek and Amanda to the conference on Organia. All lives lost.

//"All Vulcan grieves with thee."//

So Sarek had died with his own potential unrealised. Yet his aspirations lived on, with his son. Spock must have known, all along, how much his father wanted this for him, for Vulcan. The ultimate example of the Vulcan belief in IDIC: the first Human/Vulcan hybrid to sit on the Council. But he had said nothing, given them no warning until the news of T'Pol's death reached them some months later, with its accompanying invitation for Spock to assume her place on the Council.

//Did you have so little faith in me, Spock? Was it so difficult to believe that I could let you go?

How painful must it have been for you to realise that your very existence had been tailored to fit a greater design? To accept that, no matter where your search for peace of mind took you, every path would eventually lead back here? The final choice was always yours, of course - but was there ever any doubt in your mind what that decision would be?

All those years, Spock, and never one word of this... To share it might have lessened that pain a little... made these last few hours easier on both of us... helped me to accept...//

Acceptance.

//Maybe that's why you didn't tell me. If I had realised that it might come to this, would things have been the same between us? Could I have given so much of myself to you - taken so much of you - if I had known?

And you needed that closeness too - at first to make you see, to respect, your own humanity, your capacity to love - and now? Now you can share those memories with others of your race... help them overcome their age-old fears of contamination by another, more emotional people...

I know you'll try, Spock. I know you'll never stop trying. I only hope that, when you think of me, you can remember the love, the closeness - not just the pain it cost you to give it up.//

The harsh sun of Vulcan arced across the sky as the ceremony proceeded slowly to its conclusion. Beads of perspiration formed on Kirk's face and neck, trickling sluggishly down inside the high, stiff collar of his robe. At last the circle parted before him. Spock turned to face him, eyes wide open despite the glaring light, lips slightly parted. Kirk moved: slow, painful steps which led him unerringly into the centre of the group. And then Spock was kneeling on the grass before him, his cool hands clasping Kirk's own around the chalice while he drank.

The inauguration was complete, its verses over. The circle parted again, waiting for Spock to take his place among them. But he remained at Kirk's feet, his head bowed over the chalice. The silence grew, until Kirk could bear it no longer. He withdrew the chalice from the other's grasp, and whispered,

"Spock?"

The Vulcan raised his head, until their eyes met. The distance was gone, and in its place, Kirk saw only sadness - and fear.

"I will see thee again."

A statement, not a question. Kirk felt his throat close on the words he might have spoken. He could not let Spock down now. If the Vulcan did not have the strength, then he must provide it.

"Yes." //But when... and for how long? To see you, be with you - and walk away again...?// "Yes, Spock - I'll be back, whenever I can." //As long as you need me... To know that you still need me, Spock...//

The Vulcan rose to face him. For a brief moment they stood there, oblivious of any but themselves. Then Spock stepped back, towards the vacant space in the circle which was already, and would always be, his own.

Kirk let the chalice slip from his hands, as he had been instructed to do. It fell silently and unnoticed at his feet, its contents seeping slowly into the earth, staining the young grass.

Then he turned and walked back to the house, back to his life, away from the unbroken circle in the grove.

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THE EXILE OF CHARLIE X

I wanted to belong!
 I wanted all of you to like me!
 Was it so much to ask?
 Was it so hard to understand?
 Fourteen years I'd hungered
 To be able to touch someone.
 The others - how can I explain?
 They were so unlike Man.
 Then the 'Antares' came
 And it brought Humans who were like me!
 I took the chance and left with them
 Before 'they' knew I'd gone.
 Why wouldn't they accept me?
 One by one they turned against me.
 But I paid them back - I made them 'go'
 After you took me on.
 You welcomed me at first;
 You called me 'friend', and I felt happy.
 I dared to hope this was the home
 I'd tried so long to find.
 After all, there was another there
 Who was not even Human.
 If you could like that point-eared one,
 Why hate me - your own kind?
 I struck out then, in anger,
 In despair at your rejection.
 I would not be turned away!
 With or without you, I'd go home!
 And it seemed that I could do it, too.
 All the ship was in my power,
 I could make you all "go 'way"
 And get there on my own.
 Then it came - the glow I'd known so long
 And always, deep down, hated!
 And all my power left me,
 Washed away by panicked fear.
 I was - after all - a child.
 And I cried out, then, for protection.
 But you all stood there unmoving
 As the Thasians came near.
 You tried. At least you tried, Kirk!
 You promised you would train me,
 That I could learn to take my place
 With Humans in a while.
 But they said it could not be,
 And snatched me back with them forever.

And Janice Rand shed tears for me
 As I went into exile.

Sheryl Peterson

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 ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER by Valerie Piacentini
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The 'heroic Captain' image was all very well, Kirk thought bleakly, but there were times when he wished he didn't have to maintain it before a Vulcan First Officer - Humans were so much easier to deceive.

Well, he'd been warned what to expect. Chris Pike, just before Kirk's official take-over of the Enterprise, had briefed him thoroughly on his crew.

"Spock's a brilliant First Officer," he had said. "He'll back you to the limit - if you can earn his loyalty. I've been lucky, I was never tested to the point where I failed, but I always had the feeling that if I didn't measure up, he'd transfer off. I don't think a Human could ever totally command a Vulcan - they expect so much, and if we can't deliver..." His shrug was expressive.

And now, only a few short months later, Pike's prediction seemed likely to come true. Kirk suppressed a sigh of regret as he stole a quick glance at his impassive companion. Despite himself, he liked the man. He had been unsure at first, but he had quickly learned that Spock had a subtle humour Kirk could appreciate, and he had hoped - not altogether vainly - that the Vulcan was beginning to respond to his hesitant overtures of friendship. It would take a long time, of course, but the challenge was stimulating... and rewarding.

Then, only days ago, the Enterprise had been diverted to Veron on an extremely delicate mission. A preliminary survey had found Veron inhabited by a humanoid population, its civilisation approximating that of 19th century Earth, just entering its industrial age. They were a peaceful, cultured people who had, at an early stage of their development, overcome the problems of internal rivalry. Each nation maintained its independence, and the form of government that best suited its people, and was responsible for its own internal laws and disputes; where the interests of two nations threatened to conflict, however, they had evolved a practical solution. Each nation sent representatives to a Supreme Council, composed of the wisest and most trusted citizens; the verdict of the Council was final, and as their history showed, had always been accepted by the disputing parties, so that war had been unknown on Veron for nearly a thousand years.

The survey completed, the Federation had issued a Prime Directive order - the Veronese were not yet ready for alien contact, but it was hoped that one day they would prove valuable members of the Federation.

Unfortunately, fate had taken a hand when a Federation ship, on its way to a nearby Tellerite colony, had been destroyed in an ion storm. One of its lifeboats had crashed on Veron, killing its crew and passengers, but the bodies had been recovered, and the presence of Human and Tellerite corpses had created a panic among the population, who were suddenly made aware that other races besides their own existed in the galaxy.

Starfleet's monitoring of Veron's radio broadcasts had convinced the Federation Council that official contact must be made - it was becoming clear that the people feared invasion by a powerful race of star-travelling aliens.

Kirk, commanding the nearest Starship, had been ordered to make contact with the Supreme Council of Veron and reassure them - as a Human, similar to themselves, he hoped to win their confidence, while the presence of his alien First Officer should help to persuade them that the races of the Federation lived in harmony.

At first, everything had gone well. Initial contact was by radio, and permission was given for Kirk and Spock to beam down. With an honesty Kirk came to recognise as typical of the Veronese, the spokesman for the Council told

him that if he came in peace he was welcome; if he did not, there was nothing the Veronese could or would do to oppose him.

Once the initial bewilderment and suspicion had been overcome, Chief Councilman Banner willingly gave permission for others of the Enterprise crew to beam down, and the Veronese gradually began to accept not only their presence, but their peaceful intentions. As each side learned more of the other, it really began to seem that in this instance the two widely differing cultures could meet without harm to either.

Kirk, Spock and McCoy, as the senior officers, were the personal guests of Chief Councilman Banner at his official residence. To avoid national rivalry, the Council Headquarters were sited on an island which owed allegiance to no one nation, but to the planet as a whole. All citizens were welcome there without restriction, and its beauty and peace made it a popular resort for quiet enjoyment.

After several days of negotiation the Council declared a day of rest, and Banner offered to show his guests one of the planet's greatest attractions. Outside the Council City the island had been turned into an enormous park and nature reserve, where animals and birds from all over the planet were allowed to roam freely; only the more dangerous were confined to secure enclosures, where they could be studied by visitors, but had a degree of freedom. A large aquarium complex housed water-dwellers, and there were several large conservatories and greenhouses which exhibited plants from every zone of the planet, from the tiniest alpine flowers to the soaring trees of the tropical regions.

Kirk and Spock accepted the invitation with interest, but to his disappointment McCoy was recalled to the Enterprise, so that only the Captain and First Officer joined Banner, his family and friends on the tour. The park was crowded - unusually so, Banner explained, but many had come to see the alien visitors; being a courteous people, however, they kept a respectful distance, and their presence did not spoil the tour.

Kirk found it pleasant to relax as they followed their guides, taking a keen interest as some of the rarer animals were identified for him. One creature he studied especially, attracted by its grace and beauty. About the size of a horse, it had a long, silky coat, shading from white to palest gold; the head, delicate despite its size, was crowned by a pair of sharp, curving horns. The creatures showed no fear of the visitors, and Kirk remarked on this.

"Indeed, they have no fear," Banner confirmed. "It is many generations since they were last hunted. Once, vast herds covered our planet; their numbers are few today, alas, but those Zildan that remain are cared for. It is our hope..." He broke off, interrupted by a sharp exclamation from Spock.

On this relaxed, informal occasion the children had been included in the family parties. As he turned in response to Spock's warning, Kirk saw that a small boy, scarcely more than a toddler, had wandered away from his parents, and was advancing determinedly on a Zildan calf. A few yards away the mother looked up from grazing, and snorted uneasily; there was an air of tension about the party now, and Banner's low murmur confirmed Kirk's fears.

"It is dangerous to approach the calf. The mothers are nervous about their young, and might attack."

Strangely, none of the adults were making any move to rescue the child by driving the mother away. Kirk thought quickly - he was too far away, and even Spock, who was faster than he, could not hope to reach the child in time. Then, with a loud bellow, the mother wheeled round and charged towards the boy, who was reaching out to pet the calf.

There was no more time to think. Kirk drew his phaser, set it to stun, and fired. Barely feet from the child the Zildan stumbled and fell. There was a moment's shocked silence, then the people moved forward, some to comfort the now weeping child, most to cluster around the fallen animal. Kirk was aware of an intense expectancy in the crowd, but he was utterly taken aback by the wail of

dismay that arose when Banner turned and announced in a voice heavy with grief,

"The Zildan is dead."

He was even more bewildered a moment later when, in response to a swift word of command, he and Spock were seized and disarmed; their communicators were taken from them, and they were led - not ungently - back to the city. No-one could, or would, explain what was happening; they were taken to a comfortable room, locked in, and left to wait with what patience they could muster.

Food was brought, and as the evening chill drew on a fire was lit at each end of the room; it seemed that they were not to be allowed to suffer discomfort, but under the watchful eyes of the guards the servants would not speak to them - even Kirk's urgent demand to see Chief Councilman Banner brought no response.

* * *

It was full dark before the door opened again to admit Banner. The man looked nervous and haggard. Kirk bit back his irritated demand for an explanation, sensing that something extremely serious had happened, though he could not understand what.

Banner gestured them both to seats, for they had risen at his entrance, and sat down himself, studying Kirk intently.

"Captain," he began at last, "a terrible situation has arisen - I scarcely know how to tell you. No harm was intended, I am sure, and yet... such a disaster ... and involving such an honoured guest..."

"Perhaps you could explain, sir?" Spock broke in, his calm voice cutting through Banner's confusion.

"Yes, of course. Forgive me... I am so distressed... The Council has been in session, and... But you could not know..."

"Gentlemen, I must begin by telling you that many generations ago our entire world was hit by a devastating famine. For five years in succession all our crops failed, and we did not know why. Our people would have starved but for the vast herds of Zildan, slaughtered in their thousands and hundreds of thousands to provide meat. In the sixth year the blight vanished as mysteriously as it had come, but the herds, once so plentiful, had dwindled to a few hundred animals only.

"In gratitude my people decreed that never again must a Zildan be killed. They are protected, carefully bred in an attempt to increase their numbers. Captain... I fear that you have broken one of our most stringent laws. That you meant well, we know; your weapon has been examined, and we understand that you did not mean to kill, since it was locked on a stun setting. Nevertheless, a Zildan is dead, and it may well be that her calf will die too - a mother will not readily accept a fosterling. My people have come to regard the Zildan with almost superstitious awe. It has been so long since the penalty was invoked... but you...we dare not spare you." Banner's agitation was almost painful now as he looked pleadingly at Kirk. "We will mitigate the sentence as much as we can, but... the penalty is laid down."

"Penalty?" Kirk asked. "But I saved the child..."

"We know that," Banner said gently. "Captain, it may seem harsh to you, but even the parents of that boy would sooner have seen the death of their son than the death of the Zildan. It is... our way."

Kirk nodded slowly; he had seen enough of alien ways not to condemn something simply because he did not understand it - or even because he personally disapproved of it.

Banner was speaking again. "Believe me, if there was any way we could spare you this... Captain, not all Veronese are yet convinced of your peaceful intentions. We of the Council wish to trust you, and we are gradually winning over those who doubt. You yourself have said that the Federation observes the

customs of member planets - it is one of the strongest points in your favour. If you are now seen to set yourself above our strictest law, how can my people trust you?"

"I see," Kirk said thoughtfully. "I can't blame them for their doubts, Chief Councilman. What form does the punishment take?"

"A most barbaric one, I fear. After so long, how could we guess it must be invoked again?" He rose and paced the floor, as though unwilling to look at Kirk. "Captain, do you recall the lorquat trees?"

"Lorquat trees?" Kirk frowned, remembering the delicious fruit that was served as a delicacy here - even Spock, notoriously indifferent to what he ate, had pronounced them delicious. Banner had told him at the time that they were scarce, served only on important occasions, and during the tour of the botanical section of the park, he had shown the visitors why.

The lorquat trees, tall and slender, carried long, delicate fronds rather than branches; the pale green fruit grew in clusters close to the trunk. One of the attendants had demonstrated the method of gathering the fruit. First, he had reached between the fronds with a long pole, explaining that a person or animal approaching the tree would provoke the same reaction they would now see. To Kirk's amazement, as the pole neared the gently swaying fronds the tree exploded into movement, the long, whip-like branches flailing wildly, coiling around the pole and finally tearing it from the man's grip.

"The tree defends itself from predators," the attendant had explained. "Once caught by the fronds, the victim has only a few minutes to escape before pain and loss of blood produce unconsciousness and death." He moved on to another tree a few yards away. "This is how we gather the fruit."

Picking up a hose he sprayed the tree liberally, then nodded to another man who stood near wearing protective clothing. Watching the movement of the fronds carefully he made his way through them and picked the ripe fruit; the tree, though it reacted to his presence, moved only sluggishly, with little power behind the contortions of the fronds. Kirk had accepted the gift of fruit with a smile and moved on; now the memory of those lashing fronds returned vividly.

"I see that you remember," Banner nodded. "Having outlawed war, Captain, we find it impossible to compel one man to inflict pain on another. Therefore, we use the lorquats when severe punishment is decreed. Your sentence..." He swallowed nervously. "Your sentence is to walk naked through a grove of lorquat trees."

Kirk turned pale; he had not expected this. "A... trial by ordeal?" he asked, managing - somehow - to keep his voice steady.

"Not quite, for this is a punishment, not a trial. We know that you will be injured, that you will suffer, but I assure you, Captain, that death is by no means certain. If you can keep moving, keep on your feet, it is possible to survive. That is our law, Captain Kirk, and our people have observed it since the end of the famine. Will you do less?"

"Sir, may I speak?" Spock's calm voice penetrated the horror that gripped Kirk. He turned, wondering how his unemotional First Officer, to whom violence of any sort was abhorrent, would react to this pronouncement.

In response to Kirk's nod, Spock continued evenly, "Chief Councilman, I request permission to take my Captain's place. He is of greater value to the Enterprise than I; and in addition, I, as a Vulcan, have a greater tolerance of pain. If, as you say, you do not wish to cause harm, grant me this. I have a much better chance of survival than he, and my healing abilities will repair any damage much more quickly than..."

"Spock, no! I forbid it!" Kirk snapped; but Banner was already shaking his head.

"That will not be possible, Commander Spock. That such a punishment should

be required at all is distressing; that it should be inflicted on one who is innocent of any wrongdoing is intolerable."

"Then may I request that our physician be permitted to attend?"

"That, too, is impossible. Medical intervention is forbidden - the victim must live or die as fate decrees. However," Banner turned to Kirk, "as soon as you have completed the walk you may return to your ship. What follows is no concern of ours."

"Thank you for that," Kirk said quietly. "When... when will the punishment take place?"

"At dawn. We would prefer to conclude this as soon as possible, but you must understand that our opponents must be given the chance to attend, so that they will be able to testify that you submitted yourself to our laws." Banner rose. "Be assured - we will do all in our power to mitigate the severity of the punishment. Now, I must leave you. The guards will come for you when it is time."

* * *

When Banner had gone Kirk sank down, trying to realise what was going to happen to him. That he could be severely injured, he knew; he could only hope that he would not disgrace himself, that he would be able to undergo the ordeal with dignity.

Something was pressed into his hands, and he automatically tasted the wine Spock held out to him; its warmth dispelled the numbness that gripped him, and after a moment he looked up.

"Spock, why did you offer to take my place?" he asked curiously.

The dark eyes wavered for a moment, then dropped. When Spock answered it was in his most neutral tone.

"As I said, it is logical, Captain. The ship can function if I am incapacitated, you are indispensable. And I can both withstand the pain and recover from it better than a Human."

"Oh, I see." Kirk felt vaguely disappointed, but he was not sure why. "Well... thanks anyway, Spock."

"Captain, may I ask a question?"

"Of course."

"I am - forgive me - somewhat curious as to why you agreed so quickly to submit to the punishment. You could have returned to the ship - I do not think Banner would have held you by force. He is not a vindictive man, and would have let you go. Others could have completed the negotiations."

"Um, that's a fair point." Kirk finished the wine and set down the glass. "I wonder if I can explain it to you, Spock. These are a frightened people. They shouldn't have had to face alien contact for generations yet. There's an old saying on Earth... 'actions speak louder than words.' We come here, telling them how peaceful, how altruistic we are; we promise to observe their laws, safeguard their customs, their way of life. If, at the very first test, I walk away, what will they think? Okay, they have no choice but to accept what we tell them; but if we show them we mean what we say in this, then they're much more likely to believe the rest, aren't they? Here and now, I stand for the Federation and Starfleet, and Veron will judge their sincerity by my behaviour."

There was no answer, but after a moment the Vulcan touched his shoulder lightly. "May I suggest that you try to sleep, Captain? You will need all your strength tomorrow."

Sleep! Kirk thought bitterly. How the hell does he expect me to sleep with this hanging over me? But, recognising the sense in the suggestion, he allowed Spock to settle him on the couch. Dimming the lights, the Vulcan sank into a chair opposite, and with an ease that Kirk envied, was soon asleep.



For Kirk, the night seemed endless. He dozed intermittently, to start awake at the slightest sound - the logs settling in the hearth, the sound of footsteps outside the window, the changing of the guard at the door. As the long night wore on his too-vivid imagination woke, tormenting him with images of what awaited him in the morning.

Kirk was no coward, he had faced the possibility of injury or death many times, but this...! He forced himself to face the prospect squarely, hoping to lessen its horror. The lorquat fronds were strong and sharp... they would cut deep into his flesh... If he fell, became entangled, he could even die. And worst of all, worse even than death, was the thought that if one of the fronds lashed across his eyes...

With all his heart he longed for McCoy, for a Human companion now; for someone - anyone - who would understand, who would share this night of apprehension with him. How could Spock understand? To Vulcans, pain was merely a sensory input that could be controlled, sublimated. Spock was a loyal, efficient First Officer, but he certainly was not the most comforting of companions in this situation.

Still, Kirk thought, perhaps it was for the best. McCoy would have been distressed at his helplessness, filled with worry for his friend - Spock at least would not suffer any emotional disturbance. In fact, he probably considered this form of punishment a 'fascinating' cultural survival. Strange, though, how quickly he had volunteered to take his Captain's place...

With a sigh Kirk turned over and tried again to sleep. Some time later he was vaguely aware of a tall figure tending the fire; it seemed to him that Spock leaned over him for a moment, that long fingers brushed his face gently... but it must have been a dream, for he was drifting slowly, easily, into a deep and undisturbed sleep.

* * *

Kirk woke in the morning to the insistent shaking of a gentle hand; he sighed, stretched luxuriously - then he remembered, and sat up abruptly.

"Is it time?" He noted with approval that his voice was steady.

"Not quite. I thought, however, that you would prefer to compose yourself before..." Uncharacteristically the Vulcan hesitated, then continued in an even more impersonal tone than usual.

"The guards have brought hot water and towels. I was asked to request you to dress in the clothes provided. All is ready - I regret that the arrangements are so primitive."

As he spoke he indicated a screen at the far end of the room. With a nod of thanks Kirk stood up and moved to investigate. The Vulcan had arranged the few facilities to give Kirk the maximum possible privacy; as he tended to his personal needs the Human was grateful for the care that had gone into the simple arrangements - even the towels had been set to warm in front of the fire.

Feeling considerably more refreshed, Kirk picked up the clothes that had been laid out for him - a loose-fitting robe and sandals - and dressed. The reason for such garments was clear - they would be easily and quickly removed when...

Pushing the thought aside, Kirk finished his preparations. He could hear the outer door being unlocked, the clinking of metal, the low murmur of voices. When he emerged, however, Spock was alone, and he glanced enquiringly at the Vulcan.

"Breakfast," Spock said, indicating the trays of food on a low table. "I would recommend a light meal, Captain... under the circumstances."

Kirk nodded; quite frankly he doubted if his stomach would retain a heavy meal. He contented himself with some bread and fruit, noticing idly that the Vulcan also ate sparingly. Finally Spock handed him a goblet.

"This will warm you, and sustain your strength," he said quietly.

As he sipped at the spiced, heated wine Kirk felt a curious compulsion to talk, a need for some contact with his impassive companion. Gazing down into his goblet, he began hesitantly.

"Spock... this punishment... I'm no Vulcan. I'll try my best, but... I don't know if I can endure it in silence. I know that Vulcans must respect where they serve. If I fail..."

"As you said, you are Human." Spock's voice was perfectly controlled. "The Veronese understand that, and so do I. We know that you will suffer, that you cannot block the pain... But I have seen the courage with which you have accepted your punishment. Even if you are tested beyond your capacity to endure, you have already shown an integrity, an understanding of the fears of others, that must command respect."

Even as Kirk raised astonished eyes the deep notes of a gong sounded far away. Spock started visibly.

"It is time," he said gently.

Now that the moment was upon him Kirk sat feeling the numbness of fear paralyse him. Spock rose and leaned over him, taking the Human's face between his hands.

"Look at me." The deep voice held a note of command that Kirk had never heard before, and he looked up obediently.

The dark eyes held his - why had he ever thought them cold? - with a deep understanding and compassion that warmed Kirk's heart, melting the frozen fear that held him prisoner. A serene confidence flowed from the Vulcan, relaxing the Human's tense muscles as he absorbed it gratefully; the warm hands on his face were... comforting.

"Courage, my friend. You are not alone." The words were spoken so quietly that Kirk was scarcely sure he had heard them; but as the touch withdrew he found himself able to rise with an unexpected composure, conscious of Spock's supportive presence at his side.

The door opened to admit Banner and the guards. In complete silence Human and Vulcan were conducted from the room along a corridor and out into the grounds of the Council Chambers to the part of the garden where a grove of lorquat trees stood. Kirk eyed them apprehensively, remembering how quickly those graceful fronds could turn into cutting, searing lashes. He shivered.

One of the guards stepped forward, but was halted by Spock's raised hand.

"No," the Vulcan said evenly. "This is for me to do."

Turning to the Human he slid the robe from Kirk's shoulders and steadied him while he kicked off the sandals. Kirk coloured faintly, aware that besides Banner and the guards a number of Councillors were standing a few yards away. As he and Spock walked towards the trees, however, he obtained a small comfort from the realisation that the watchers were grave-faced, displaying no hostility - indeed, he had the impression that they wished him well.

Kirk was intensely aware of physical sensation: the cool damp grass under his bare feet; the delicate scent of flowers; the caressing touch of the breeze in his hair. It seemed impossible that anything so barbaric could happen in such a setting.

Banner's eyes, filled with sorrow, held his. "What we are permitted to do, we have done," he said softly. "We have chosen a small grove of young trees - their venom is not as dangerous. And Captain... my people would think shame to witness your suffering."

Banner gestured, and every person in the garden turned as one, facing away from the trees.

"May your god go with you," Banner murmured; then he too turned away.

* * *

Kirk stood at the edge of the grove, watching as the trees, sensing a presence nearby, began to stir restlessly. Panic began to rise in him. Spock had vanished... he was alone... he could not...

The calm voice echoes again in his mind. //Courage, my friend./ Spock had called him that... Could he keep the Vulcan's respect after this? He could only... try.

As he hesitated for a final moment an irresistible compulsion drew his gaze to the far side of the grove. Spock stood just beyond the reach of the fronds; as their eyes met the Vulcan extended his hands encouragingly and smiled - a hesitant, shy smile that transformed the austere face, softening it into a rare beauty.

At once confidence and reassurance filled the Human. Spock believed - knew - that the strength he needed was there, and now he knew it too. Keeping his gaze locked on the compelling dark eyes Kirk took a step forward, placing himself within reach of the deadly fronds.

He could feel the lashes coiling round his body and limbs, saw blood spring from the cuts, but there was no pain. The wine, then? Had it been drugged? If so, Banner had indeed been merciful. But Kirk quailed inwardly as he visualised the damage that those jagged whips would inflict on him. If he was caught, held immobilised... if one of the fronds caught his eyes... Blindness...

Then a cool serenity that flowed from no internal source took possession of his mind, and the terrifying images faded. He was aware of nothing save the dark eyes that held his so calmly, the reaching, encouraging hands that were not so very far away... He paced steadily, carefully, towards that promised safety.

Another step... and another... Then a sharp stone, unseen in the grass, turned under his bare foot and he staggered, losing concentration. His gaze was wrenched from Spock's, and he slumped to his knees as the full force of the pain ripped through him. He fought to remain upright, aware that if he fell completely he would not rise, but blood ran down his chin from his bitten lip as he struggled to regain his feet.

//LOOK AT ME!//

The command thundered in his mind, compelling obedience; as the dark and hazel eyes locked again it seemed that a barrier snapped into place in his mind, insulating him from the pain so that he could think calmly again. And he was safe, those eyes holding him, guiding him to safety, their brightness the only reality.

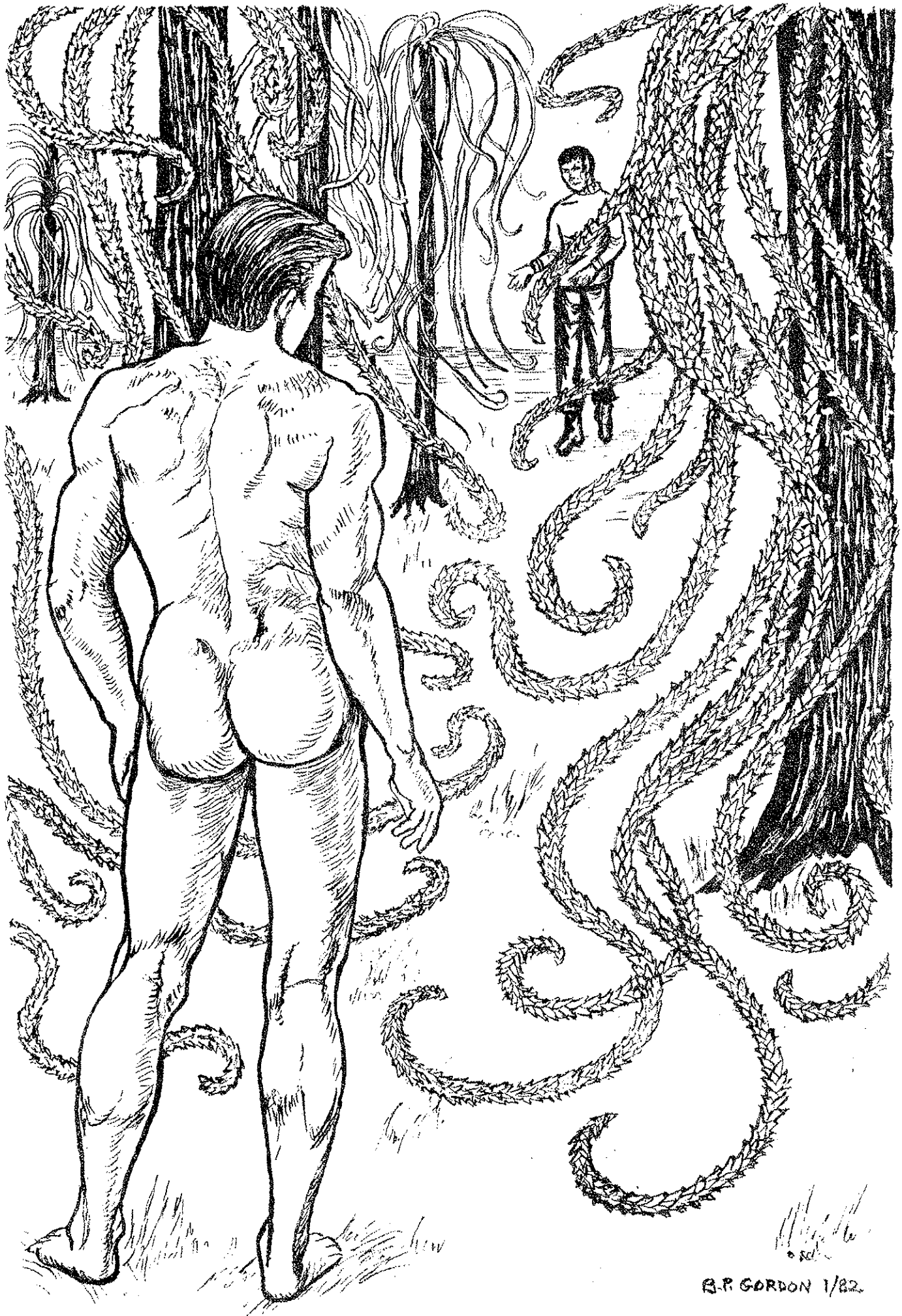
Somehow he was moving again, steadily covering the last few yards; but he was so tired, so confused... Eager hands caught him, clung, helped him beyond the reach of the flailing branches. The robe was slipped around his shoulders and he was lifted into strong arms where he lay still; he was not sure of what was happening, but it didn't seem to matter - he clung trustingly to the stranger/friend who held him so securely.

Voices echoed around him, sounding far-away and dream-like; every inch of his body was throbbing, but in some strange way the pain did not quite touch him - it was as though he was aware of it in someone else rather than experiencing it himself.

He recognised Banner's voice. "Captain, we will keep our pledge to your people as you have kept yours to us. Commander, our physicians are waiting. We have decided to permit..."

"No." Spock's refusal was firm. "Our own doctor will tend him. You promised we might return at once to our ship."

"We will keep our word. Your communicators are here."



He felt movement as Spock accepted and opened the communicator. "Mr. Kyle - two to beam up."

* * *

Kirk was scarcely conscious when the transporter platform solidified under Spock's feet. The journey to Sickbay passed in a dream, and McCoy's anxious questions, Spock's brief explanation, were remote.

When he came fully awake he was lying in bed in Sickbay. The sense of unreality that had haunted him all morning had gone, he was fully alert - and curious.

Kirk smiled up into McCoy's anxious eyes. "How am I?" he asked.

"Better than you've any right to be!" McCoy snorted. "Some of the lashes are deep, but luckily for you they all missed your face. The pain must have been bad, Jim - the fronds contain an irritant - a bit like Terran stinging nettles, only worse. Spock had the sense to bring a sample with him, so I was able to prepare an antidote, otherwise you'd be pretty sick right now.

"It's a good job, too, that you were able to stay on your feet and keep moving - if you'd absorbed much more of the irritant, the shock could have affected your heart. As it is, you'll only be off duty long enough to allow the wounds to heal. You can thank Spock for getting you back here as fast as he did."

"Spock!" Kirk said suddenly. "Where is he?"

"Here, Captain," the tranquil voice said. "I am relieved that you have suffered no serious injury."

"It seems not. Spock, what did you do?"

An eyebrow rose as the clear eyes met his. "I did nothing, Captain. I regret that I was unable..."

"Cut it out, Spock," McCoy growled. "If there had been anything you could have done, you'd have done it, Jim knows that. Now get out of here - I want him to rest."

So like McCoy, Kirk thought. He might seize every opportunity to tease and torment the Vulcan, but he seemed to know instinctively when to hold his tongue.

"Very well, Doctor. I will be in my quarters." The veiled eyes met Kirk's briefly. "Rest well, Captain."

With an abrupt nod Spock turned to leave, and Kirk submitted with a resigned sigh to McCoy's fussing, but a frown of puzzlement crossed his face for an instant. There had been something... odd... about Spock's departure, but he couldn't quite...

Insidiously the sedative asserted control, postponing all questions.

* * *

When Kirk next awoke it was the middle of the ship's night. He felt perfectly fit, completely rested, and his mind was working clearly again. For a long time he lay remembering all that had happened on Veron, and the more he remembered the more certain he became that, despite his denial, Spock had been responsible for the fact that he had felt no pain.

With startled clarity he recalled those compassionate eyes looking deeply into his, felt again that gentle touch on his face.

His face. Surely there was something...? Kirk concentrated on his limited knowledge of Vulcans, and at last he began to understand.

The mind touch. Vulcans could... meld?... with another mind... He progressed slowly, reasoning it out step by step.

He should have felt pain, but there had been none, except for that time when he had broken eye-contact with the Vulcan. If Spock had indeed touched his

mind, taken the pain... then that surely meant...?

With shocked awareness Kirk sat up as the final clue slotted into place. There had been something odd about Spock's departure - he remembered how awkwardly the Vulcan had moved, so unlike his usual grace, and how very carefully he had guarded his expression.

Such a little thing - for a Human; but that it should show at all in Spock proved that the Vulcan must have been under considerable strain. Kirk reached out and pressed the call button beside his bed. A few minutes later McCoy hurried in.

"What's the matter, Jim? Can't you sleep? Are you in pain?"

"No, nothing like that. Bones, I'm sorry to disturb you..."

"You didn't," McCoy assured him. "I sometimes take the night watch - it's only fair on my staff. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I have to see Spock."

"Jim, it's the middle of the night!"

"I know. It's just..." Kirk bit his lip thoughtfully. "It's just that I have the feeling that I must talk to him tonight."

McCoy studied his patient for a moment, then nodded. "Okay - if it's that important I'll call him."

"No, don't do that." Kirk's voice stopped him as he reached for the intercom. "I want to see him in his quarters."

"You need rest - can't it wait until morning?"

"No, it can't. Look, Bones, I promise I'll come straight back here when I've finished. Honestly, it's important."

On the verge of a refusal, McCoy hesitated. "Okay," he said at last, "but only on condition that you come back. Agreed?"

"Agreed," Kirk nodded.

* * *

Outside Spock's door Kirk hesitated, then buzzed. The door slid open and he stepped inside, his eyes taking a few moments to adjust to the dim lighting.

"Good evening, Captain." Spock rose from behind his desk. "I knew that you would come - I was waiting for you."

"Then you must also know why I'm here. What did you do down there, and how did you do it?"

The dark eyes wavered and fell. "As I said, it was logical. You are more valuable to the ship..."

"Mr. Spock, you're a liar."

"Yes, sir." The reply was almost inaudible.

"Then... why?"

Spock looked up almost timidly. "As a Vulcan, I knew I could take the pain for you. There is a form of the mind touch... I hoped you would assume that Chief Councilman Banner had drugged the wine so that you felt nothing. Only... when you stumbled... my concentration was broken, and you suffered until I could regain control of your mind. I was also able to delay the effect of the irritant. I assure you, Captain, there was no risk to... either of us; a few hours meditation will restore me. It was only... I only wanted... to help..."

"So you took the pain that should have been mine, and said nothing." Kirk's voice was very gentle. "How can I thank you, my friend?"

To his surprise, Spock's eyes fell again. "I do not think you fully

understand, Captain. We are taught that Humans fear the mind touch. I knew that if I explained, you would forbid me to intervene, and so I entered your mind without your consent. I ask forgiveness for such an invasion of your privacy."

"Forgiveness!" Kirk stared blankly. "I thought I was beginning to understand you, Spock. You calmed my fears, gave me the strength to go through with it, saved me from pain... and you ask forgiveness! I am honoured that you should think me worthy of such help. It was no intrusion, but a valued gift, and I will cherish the memory."

Slowly the doubt faded from the Vulcan's eyes, and to Kirk's delight a hesitant, shy smile touched Spock's lips for an instant.

"Thank you, Captain. Will you not go and rest now?"

"I'd better, or I'll have McCoy in here looking for me," Kirk grinned, turning to the door. He looked back as the soft voice called his name.

"Jim... something you said on Veron... I remembered it. I do not know the Human ways of friendship, but... I wish to learn. If I cannot always say what I feel..."

"I know." Kirk reached out and touched the thin shoulder for a moment. "Actions speak louder than words. I'll remember that. And... because of the meld, I think the Enterprise will be a less lonely place for me from now on, my friend."

"And for me," Spock admitted quietly.

With a last smile Kirk was gone; and in the cabin behind him the echo of that smile curved the Vulcan's lips as he prepared to retire.

✧ ✧ ✧

Many months later, on the illusion planet of the Melkotians, only Spock's ability to distinguish between reality and illusion stood between the landing party and certain death. And it was Kirk's quiet, confident acceptance of the meld that gave McCoy and Scott the ability to trust that brought them all safely through the test.

MEMORIES OF PARADISE

A sound so sweet,
A sigh so poignant
So as to cause the salty droplets to fall
From beneath the golden lashes
Which house the hazel eyes
Of unaccountable depth and feeling,
Belonging to the man who could not be described
In words.

It takes more than mere vocabulary
To portray the man unique in all the galaxy.
Imagination fails, as does the dream -
Miserable comparison, in the face
Of what he is to all who know him.
Fool was I, at first, to fail to see it.
I hid behind the logical facade I had constructed
And missed so much.

And now I am helpless in his need.
Depressed with guilt and grief,
He normally maintains his command image for his crew,
But I can - now - see beneath, right to the core of the man.
I can see the pain that music he had heard
Has caused him.
It conjures images of an Earth-like place,
Where he had loved - and married.

It is as if she calls to him
From that grave in which he placed her.
She remains with him always,
In the sight of orange blossom,
In the scent of honeysuckle,
In the memories that remain so vivid, though months have passed.
He would not change the time he had - there with her,
But he so wishes finality could revert itself.

There is no shame in the tears that fall.
He faces all present, unembarrassed,
And all accept his grief, and understand.
His hazel eyes meet mine across a room, and he's able to smile.
Can my friendship, my very presence, mean so much to him?
... I should know better than to ask, now.
Though I cannot help, he knows I'm here,
And he knows I understand, also.

Uhura sees what she has caused
By music created by her hand,
And approaches him with outstretched arms.
He smiles at her, and embraces
A belief they both share in life.
Freedom - a concept, important,
Over and above so many others.
They believe it - And Miramanee made her choice...
Freely!

Karen Hayden

* * * * * A STANDARD SURVEY * * * * *

The survey was going to be lengthy; the solar system had not been previously explored, and normally would have been given only a quick check, reported, and left to Starfleet's Survey Section to explore further. However, pressure on Starfleet to find and/or release a planet for agricultural development was strong, and it had become a matter of political importance that one be found. The Captains of all Starfleet vessels, from the smallest Scoutship to the newest Starship, had received instructions to give top priority to planetary survey until further notice. So, when the Enterprise's sensors detected two planets within the ecosphere of Delta Aurigae, Kirk knew that both would have to be thoroughly checked, despite the delay to his schedule that would result. Fortunately, they were in standard cruising mode - there was no clash of priorities such as Kirk had occasionally had to resolve in the past.

Spock brought the sensor report to Kirk's cabin once he had amassed as much data on both as was possible from a long-distance scan.

"Both are M-class planets," he reported, and Kirk sighed resignedly. Well, it had been too much to hope for, that one or both would show up, on first scan, as uninhabitable. "Oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere; gravity and mass of the innermost planet, .95 of Earth normal, and of the outer one, 1.03 of Earth normal."

"Both within acceptable range for colonisation," Kirk commented.

"Yes, Captain. Sensors gathered more data on the outer planet; primitive life forms present, extensive plant cover, no sapient or pre-sapient life, oceans of low salinity. There are mineral deposits which could be used to provide a colony with sufficient metals for internal use, at least initially, and ease the financial strain on the early development of an agricultural colony.

"The inner planet has an extremely strong magnetic field which disrupts the readings but does indicate the presence of a considerable amount of iron ores. As far as I can ascertain, fully 50% of the surface is water and there are indications of life form readings, both plant and animal, but I cannot be more precise. I asked Mr. Kyle to check the transporter with regard to beaming a landing party to the surface, and he reports that the transporter beam is also affected by the magnetism; it is not advisable to beam anyone down. Survey of it ~~must~~ be by shuttlecraft."

"Yes, of course... There are no problems regarding the outer planet?"

"None that I can detect, Captain. The inner one also should be perfectly straightforward, apart from using the shuttle."

"Very well. It'll speed the whole thing up if we split the survey and do both halves at the same time. I'll take the Enterprise into orbit around the outer planet - leave Carstairs with me to take charge of the survey team, it'll be valuable experience for him; and you take a party by shuttle to the inner planet. We'll come over and pick you up in fourteen days - that should be long enough to satisfy the Powers that Be that we've done a thorough survey."

"We should accomplish a full survey in less, Captain."

"You know that; I know it. Starfleet Command knows it. But the Federation Colonising Authority doesn't, and they're the ones who have to be satisfied before they even consider assigning an experimental colony to a planet."

Spock nodded almost gloomily. "The beaurocratic mind..."

Kirk chuckled. "Don't let them worry you."

"Worry is an emotion, Captain..."

"With which you are perfectly familiar, Mr. Spock."

The Vulcan's attempt to look indignant while remaining impassive made Kirk grin - a grin in which his affection for his First Officer showed clearly. Spock

held his expression for a moment before allowing an answering gleam of affectionate amusement to show.

"You've got the awkward assignment, Spock," Kirk went on, serious again. "We know almost nothing about 'your' planet. Be careful - "

"Naturally, Captain. Self-preservation is logical."

"I wish you'd remember that a bit oftener."

"You never seem to remember it at all."

Kirk grinned again. "Captains aren't allowed to," he said lightly.

Spock looked suspiciously at him. "Jim...promise me you'll be careful."

"Spock, what danger could there be on a planet like this one appears to be? But O.K. - I'll leave all the work to Carstairs and the Science Department," Kirk assured him. "I might go down for a quick look - but that'll be all. Satisfied?"

Spock still looked doubtful. "I have...a premonition...a feeling that there is danger in this mission," he replied.

"Spock, you worry too much," Kirk said. "This is going to be a perfectly standard survey."

The shuttle containing Spock's party left and Kirk took the Enterprise on to the outer planet. In view of Spock's report on the inner planet, Kirk ordered Kyle to check this one too before beaming anyone down, and soon discovered that this planet's magnetism also possessed the ability to disrupt the transporter. Kirk therefore ordered the landing party to go down by shuttle as well, and decided to accompany them as pilot. He would then return to the Enterprise with the shuttle; regulations demanded that only one shuttle at a time be assigned away from the ship for any length of time. It would be a nuisance for Carstairs' party, but it couldn't be helped.

Atmospheric conditions as the shuttle descended quickly deteriorated. It soon became clear that a severe electrical storm was raging over a considerable part of the planet's surface. They could only hope that they would fly out of the affected area, since it didn't matter which parts of the planet they surveyed first.

The shuttle was tossed about wildly in the gusting wind. They struggled to hold the little craft steady. For a while it seemed that they were winning; then lightning flashed, forking wildly, darting from a cloud towards the shuttle. The spark made contact; the shuttle was flung violently across the sky. The electricity that poured into it in that instant cut out the engines even as it struck. Without power, there was no way the little craft could be righted, and it hurtled downwards. Even had its occupants been conscious there was nothing they could have done to avoid the crash that shattered the shuttle, sending up fragments of metal and bodies in all directions. One body limp in unconsciousness landed on a thick bed of moss that partly cushioned the impact. The others were not so fortunate.

When he regained consciousness, his only awareness was of pain. His head throbbed unmercifully. He blinked his eyes open, and the light went darts of agony deep into his brain. Slowly, the stabbing torment eased; he turned his head slowly round.

All around him was...what? He whimpered in dread of the unknown, unable even to think of any words to describe his surroundings. His mind was that of a newborn infant; he could remember nothing.

After a while, something sparkling not far away caught his attention.

Curiosity - the curiosity of the very young - stirred. He had to find out what it was. It took some minutes of struggling before he managed to roll over and discover what his hands and knees were for; he began to crawl slowly towards the sparkle.

He reached out to it and his hand disappeared into it. It was...a new sensation. He pulled his hand out of the sparkle and his hand looked different. An inquisitive tongue licked. It had no taste, yet it was good. He wanted more. He leaned down and plunged his face into the sparkle - and choked. It was sheer chance that lifted his head again, and he found he could breathe once more.

He learned quickly. A few minutes of experimenting and he learned how to swallow the sparkle without choking. It eased the ache inside him that he had only been half aware of. Then he looked around again.

Close by, something moved. A large object...large and frightening. Even as his mind shrank back in terror, his body remembered the skills the years had taught it; under the impetus of that awful fear, his body scrambled to its feet and ran. Behind him, the slow-moving carnivore, attracted by his single-minded concentration on the water, relaxed, again watching patiently until another unwary creature happened to pass near. It was used to seeing its prey running off.

The terrified flight ended when he tripped over a projecting root to fall heavily. He lay still, trembling, gasping for breath. So far, almost the whole experience of life that was in his memory was of unpleasantness.

He tried to think, but knew no words to formulate his thoughts. He sat up and looked around.

All about him were huge, but motionless, things. They sent out...something that had made him fall. He reached out experimentally and touched, muscles ready to jerk away at the first sign of pain. There was none. The surface was cool and hard, rough, unyielding, and his mind registered that this could not move to hurt him. His body remembered again how to stand and walk; he went to the nearest ...thing...and touched it. Hard. His feeler did not sink into it. Although he lacked words he did not lack intelligence, and his mind supplied references. That these were references only he could understand was immaterial; there was no-one to communicate them to.

He explored cautiously. There were hard high solids on all sides, effectively hiding the sparkle where pain lived but which had eased the ache inside him. He needed sparkle again, too, his body told him. He moved on, watchful.

A noise attracted him. Sparkle? It looked like it, but this sparkle was moving, not still, trickling between stones in a narrow stream. Were there pains about? He couldn't see any... Perhaps pains only lived beside still sparkle, not moving. Watch... Watch... He went forward slowly, ready to run, but nothing moved and at last he caught some of the moving sparkle in his feeler and raised it to his taster. Yes. It tasted the same, but it did not ease the ache so effectively as it had done.

Something brightly coloured caught his attention and he turned towards it. Some bright things hung from a hard high solid. It was less high than some of the others and he could reach the brights. They attracted him and he pulled at one. It came away in his feeler and he looked at it. Instinct raised it to his taster and he bit into it, chewed it and swallowed. It was good. He finished it. He pulled another bright, but even as he bit into it he looked round to make sure no pains had come near. He had learned the first lesson in survival thoroughly.

He could no longer see clearly. Without any memory of day and night, it took him some time to realise that it was the light that was fading, not his seeing. He shivered, aware that his feelers and movers were hurting. Instinct made him rub his feelers together. It eased the hurt. He had to find a warm to shelter in...to protect him from the pains, too, while he could not see if any were approaching.

There didn't seem to be anywhere. Hard high solids stood all around; there

was no shelter there. Or was there? One had fallen; it lay, the green on which it had stood pulled up with it and curled over, forming a small roofed corner, partly walled in on another side by its stem. He crawled in and curled up. Slowly he began to feel more comfortable, if only the ache in his body would ease. Finally he slept.

He woke to find it light again. Memory had still not returned; he did not think to wonder about who he was or where he had come from, but instead set to work to make his warm more comfortable. He studied it carefully and then piled earth up to block some of the holes. He found dead browns nearby and carried a couple of holders full to his warm. He was handicapped by the torn skin that covered his upper body, and after some experimenting he worked out how to take it off. Off, he realised he could use it to carry things, and promptly did so, thus speeding up the 'furnishing' of his warm. That also helped him when, shortly after, a further physical discomfort made itself felt; he was able to unfasten his lower skin with a minimum of difficulty. He debated removing this skin too, but realised that he would probably be more comfortable wearing it.

That accomplished, he realised that he was again wanting brights and sparkle.

As he ate, he remembered the pains. It had not been pleasant, seeing the big creature approaching. Could he find a way to frighten the pains? Something sharp, perhaps...

The days passed. The general ache in his body eased, and became a memory. He roamed further afield with each day, learning the geography of his territory, discovering new foods. He learned where the pains lived - always near sparkle, for they were not fast movers, and fast, small movers were sometimes unwary when they approached sparkle.

One day in his wandering he reached an area where hard high solids did not grow, and he stared out across the open space wondering at the distance he could see. Not far from the edge of where the solids grew something glittered, and he moved cautiously towards it. As he neared it, it stopped glittering. A lot of sharp-edged stones were lying scattered; flat, oddly shaped. Among these stones were strangely-shaped white sticks, that finally he realised resembled what was left once the pains had caught a small mover. These, then, had been unwary movers who had been caught by pains. He looked round quickly in case one, even then, was creeping up on him, but the area around him was comfortably empty. To one side, he saw sparkle, and a memory connected. He had come from here...that sparkle was the first thing he could remember. But a pain lived there. He turned back in among the hard high solids again, the ache within him telling him it was time to find a meal.

Something in his mind told him that small movers might be edible, if he could catch them. He rejected the thought. Memory of his first positive action was too strong; he would not, if he could avoid it, subject any small mover to the flee-urge he had known or the hurt he could remember. The thrower he now always carried was purely for defence against the pains.

He had quickly fallen into a routine. Exploration of his surroundings filled his days, but left him vaguely dissatisfied. He had no word for the concept, but boredom was becoming a problem. Yet he could think of nothing more to fill his days.

He was returning from a lengthy expedition, tired but not contented, when he saw a pain, in front and a little to one side of him. From its movements, he realised it was stalking prey. His lips tightened; he was aware of sympathy for the small mover that was its intended victim. The pains were cruel. But he knew already that to interfere - to save this mover - was misplaced kindness. The pain would find and kill another one...and this one would not learn from its narrow

escape, as he had done, but would run into danger again, perhaps even before the day was out. He moved on, doubly watchful. The pain might change its mind and go for him.

A flash of movement caught his eye. The pain's proposed prey was...quite like himself, standing on two walkers instead of four. He had become so used to the idea that there was no other mover like him that it took a moment for the realisation to pass from disbelief to acceptance. But where had it come from?

During that moment, the other upright mover became aware of the pain. He raised his hand, pointing at the pain...and nothing happened. Had the mover expected its action to frighten the pain? As the pain leaped, its victim grabbed up an unprepared thrower, but only succeeded in distracting the pain slightly. It misjudged its leap and overshot, its claws tearing open its victim's cover skin and own skin. Blood that the watcher realised was a different colour to his own ran from the gouges. The pain turned; its victim lay, perhaps dead, perhaps just too frightened to move - the watcher could not be sure. But this victim was a mover like himself. He could not leave this one to its fate. He sprang forward, thrower raised, thrusting it again and again at the pain. The creature backed away, uttering the harsh snarl he knew often frightened small movers.

He was aware of a new feeling. He had frightened a pain! But he did not allow his triumph to lull him into a false sense of security. He continued to watch the pain until he was sure it had forgotten him, then he bent to the mover lying at his walkers.

The mover was stirring slightly, uttering very soft sounds. He frowned. If he left the mover here, it would surely die; he must take it back to his warm. It was not large, but there was room enough for two. But how could he take the mover back? Instinct, that had served him well in the past, took over again. Almost of their own volition, his feelers slipped under the mover, and he lifted it carefully in his holders.

The mover was still asleep when he reached the warm. The entrance was small; he could not carry the mover in. He took its upper body carefully in his feelers and pulled it in, carefully covering it with dead browns. Then he went out and gathered some brights. If the hurt mover wanted sparkle it would have to walk to it or let him carry it; he had no way of carrying sparkle despite trying to find one. He took the brights back to the warm.

The hurt mover was tossing restlessly and he crouched beside it wanting to help but not knowing how to. He touched the dried blood cautiously, wondering again at the colour. The mover seemed to be suffering from the same hurt that had afflicted him on the first night that he could remember, before he found his warm; it too was shaking slightly. He remembered how he had curled up and slowly felt better. Perhaps there was some way...

Again instinct took over. He slid his holders round the sleeping mover and held it close. There was a strange...satisfaction in the contact. The mover stirred again; once more instinct helped him. He had not vocalised anything since his awakening - what need, with no-one to hear? But now his lips formed the words, "Rest. Safe here."

The mover seemed to understand; it sighed, and began to repeat, "S..." But the effort of uttering the sound seemed to exhaust it. It leaned its head against him and slept again. The complete trust shown touched him, and he lay awake for a long time considering the warmth of the thought before his seeing closed and he also slept.

He woke, puzzled at first by the body lying warm in his holders, then memory returned. The mover was lying peacefully this morning. He studied its face in the dim light of the warm, liking what he saw.

The mover's seeing opened; it looked up at him, and smiled. It said, quietly and very contentedly, "Spock..."

* * * * *

The survey of the outer planet had progressed satisfactorily, but it soon became obvious that they would in fact require much more than the fortnight to complete it. The planet was very fertile, with wide flora and only very primitive fauna, mostly in the sea. The plant life, however, varied from several that could be developed and used by colonists through a lot that were useless to some that were, for various reasons, positively dangerous. It would need a very full survey to distinguish fully between many of these, and also to determine whether there would be any lasting harm done to the planet's ecology if any dangerous species should be eradicated. Carstairs estimated that a full, complete survey would take several years to complete because of that. Kirk sent off a preliminary report recommending that Starfleet send out a fully equipped botanical research vessel and crossed his fingers that Spock's planet produced no problems. It was an undemanding fortnight and with the ship on orbit standby Kirk quickly became bored. He would gladly have joined the landing party, but botany was not a subject in which he had much interest and he guessed that he would become as bored down there very quickly - nor could he be of much positive help for he had only the most passing superficial knowledge of the subject. He missed Spock, too; McCoy was good company, but lacked the almost instinctive understanding of Kirk's moods that the Vulcan possessed. Come to that, there were times when Kirk felt he understood Spock's alien philosophy better than he did McCoy's medical one. In addition, he could relax in Spock's company in a way that for some reason he had never been able to determine was impossible with anyone else. All in all, Kirk was extremely relieved when the fortnight was up and they could go back for Spock's party.

He left a shuttle with Carstairs; the survey of the outer planet would have to continue until he received further orders from Starfleet concerning it. Then he headed back to the inner planet, not really surprised to achieve orbit before Spock. But when twenty-four hours had passed and the shuttle still had not appeared, Kirk really began to worry.

"Mr. Chekov," he ordered abruptly after Uhura assured him for the twentieth time that she was getting no response from Spock's party, "scan the surface. See if you can find anything, anything at all, that might help us detect the landing party." Even as he spoke, his mind slid back several years to another missing shuttle. Spock had been aboard it, too...and had miraculously survived. They had had so many narrow escapes over the years... One day, he supposed gloomily, their luck would run out and one of them would be left alone. He could only hope that it was not yet.

It took Chekov five interminable days to detect signs of what might be a power source. He could not be certain; the planet's magnetism disrupted all the readings. But it was the first sign of anything that even looked as if it might not belong to the planet. Kirk took down a search party in a third shuttle, reflecting as he did so that regulations regarding shuttles were being rather noticeably broken. He shrugged the thought off as irrelevant.

As he landed, his first thought was that Chekov had been wrong. Then he looked again.

"Oh, my god!"

The crashed shuttlecraft's engine had somehow remained more or less intact, although it was half buried in the ground. Soil was flung up in a circle round it like a small meteor crater. Rayed round the crater were bits and pieces of metal...and six shattered, twisted skeletons. The ground around showed traces of destroyed vegetation. A thick bed of moss-like growth had survived best, though even it showed damage where metal had torn through its two-foot-thick depth. The moss was filling the gaps with new growth, but they were still clearly visible.

Kirk walked round hesitantly, to look at each skeleton in turn. Some of the bones showed toothmarks; insects rose buzzing from the eye-sockets of a skull. There was nothing to indicate which body was which, although Kirk knew that

McCoy would be able to identify each.

One body was missing. Dragged away by some carnivore? It didn't seem likely that one man out of the seven in the shuttle had survived - not a crash such as this one had been. Their luck had finally run out. Kirk fought back the tears.

Behind him he could hear the two men of his shuttle crew muttering together. He took a deep breath, straightened his back and turned.

"We'll need to get the bodies back to the Enterprise," he said, the evenness of his voice surprising himself. "Go back to the ship, tell Dr. McCoy what's happened, and bring him down to see to it. I'll stay here...have a look round and see if I can find the other body."

"Aye, sir." Kirk stood back as the shuttle took off.

Alone, he sank down on one knee, allowing his grief release.

After a while he stood, pulling himself together. There was one body missing. He should look round, see if he could find any clues to indicate where it had gone. There were marks on the ground as if something had moved very clumsily from the bed of moss towards some water that he could see some distance away, glistening in the sunlight. Could it have been one of the seven man crew of the shuttle, somehow miraculously escaped death? Even if it had been, the marks showed that whatever it was had not walked. Seriously hurt, desperate for water, crawling towards it... and probably dying there of his injuries. Kirk followed the marks.

They reached the water. He could see where someone had stopped to drink; the mark of a hand was clearly imprinted in the soft ground. Then...the marks changed. Only a running biped could have left those tracks! Suddenly a little more hopeful that someone had, against all the odds, survived, Kirk followed the tracks away from the water and into a wood.

After a short distance, he paused, looking round. A movement caught his eye; a huge creature like a sabre-toothed wolf was approaching. He whipped out his phaser and fired.

Nothing happened.

There wasn't time to analyse why. (Later he realised that the malfunction was caused by the magnetism of the planet.) As the creature leaped at him, Kirk snatched up a nearby branch to use as a weapon.

His wild swipe distracted the beast only slightly; however, it overshot him, but its extended claws tore open his shirt and gouged great scratches in his shoulder and upper arm, the impact sending him flying, stunned as his head hit a root.

He partially regained consciousness to an awareness of pain and cold. The creature...where was it? He struggled to move...

Something was holding him...the animal? A soft familiar voice murmured, "Rest. Safe, here."

Kirk sighed. The miracle had happened after all. He began to say "S..." but it was too much effort. He let his head rest against the Vulcan's shoulder, and allowed sleep to claim him.

When Kirk woke, he already felt much better. Memory returned; he opened his eyes, and smiled at the dimly-seen face looking down at him.

"Spock," he said. "Thank god."

His joy quickly faded at the unexpected response. Spock frowned, as if puzzled, as if trying to remember something.

"Spock? What is it?"

The Vulcan's lips moved silently, as if he was trying to say something but couldn't.

"What's wrong? Can't you speak? But you spoke to me last night..."

"Speak... Can't..." Spock shook his head helplessly. The movement showed Kirk a mark on the Vulcan's head; he reached up and pushed the hair falling over the forehead gently aside. The scar showed clear, even in the faint light.

A head injury. Quite severe, too; it was well healed but would certainly leave a bad scar unless McCoy operated to remove it. Head injuries were nasty things, too.

"Can you remember what happened?" Kirk asked gently.

"Can...can't...can't remember!" It was said almost triumphantly, and Kirk understood why. The Vulcan had managed to communicate something, and he knew it.

"Can you understand me?" Kirk asked.

"Understand."

Kirk drew a deep breath. Knowledge was not gone, then, just the memory of it. That being so, the Vulcan could be helped to remember.

"Can you remember who I am?"

"Can't...but...but you...I..." Spock shook his head again, lacking the words to express what he meant. He let instinct guide him yet again and reached out to touch Kirk's face gently. Kirk guessed what he meant. He couldn't remember... but he was drawn to the Human. Kirk smiled encouragingly.

"Yes, Spock. I like you, too. We're friends."

"Friend?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. I never had a better friend than you, Spock. Not even Bones... I'm Jim, Spock. Don't you remember Jim?"

"Jim..." Something connected vaguely. "Captain?"

"Yes, Spock. Captain." Association of ideas. Good. "You came here in a shuttle. It crashed. Do you know where it crashed?"

Spock considered. The place with the sharp stones that he remembered coming from? It could be. "Yes," he said.

"They'll be looking for us there...for me. We thought you were dead too. I'm...very glad you're alive."

Together they scrambled out of the shelter Spock had made out of the fallen tree and some turf and heaped up soil. Kirk looked at it in the growing daylight, then at the Vulcan, respect in his eyes. With no memory to help him, Spock had managed to construct a most efficient little 'home', using only his bare intellect.

"That's a well-made shelter," Kirk said approvingly.

Spock picked up one of his home-made spears and handed it to Kirk, then took one himself.

"Danger?" Kirk asked. "Like that creature that attacked me yesterday? They're common?"

"Yes." It was not a complete answer, but it was the only one Spock's growing vocabulary could give. There were more kinds of pain than the one that had attacked his...friend.

The trip was uneventful, however, though Kirk became aware, as they went, that the sooner McCoy had a look at the scratches he had received, the better it would probably be. It might just be that the wounds had stiffened, but they had definitely begun to nip in a way that spoke of possible infection.

Spock led the way unerringly. A few tiny creatures scattered in front of them, and Kirk noted consciously what he had noted subconsciously the previous day. Birds did not figure in the fauna here.

Ahead, Kirk saw a shuttle through the trees, and movement. Spock stopped.

Kirk glanced at him. "It's all right, Spock. They're some of our men."

"Friends?"

"Yes - at least, we all work together in harmony. They do what you tell them, Spock. I'm the only person senior to you on the Enterprise. You're my First Officer."

Spock looked a little doubtful, but he followed obediently as Kirk moved on. They were not seen at first; the men were clearly preparing to begin a search for their Captain, and Kirk mentally noted a commendation for Security Chief Baillie's organisation as he gave the security teams their orders. There was no sign of the bodies, but McCoy was there, checking his medical kit.

The doctor closed the bag containing the kit and fastened it at his belt, looking up as he did so. A look of blank incredulity was immediately followed by a beaming grin. "Jim! Spock!"

The security guards looked round. There was a concerted rush for them. Spock uttered a startled, wordless sound, but before he could move, Kirk said "It's all right, Spock. They're glad to see us, that's all."

"Where were you, Jim? Spock, how did you - "

"Later, Bones. Spock can't remember anything. He'd even forgotten how to speak...but he understands us and can identify associations, so I think we'll be able to help him remember all right."

Once on board the Enterprise, McCoy subjected Spock to a very thorough examination. He finally satisfied himself that the Vulcan had somehow escaped the crash relatively undamaged, although just how, he couldn't think. There were traces of almost healed muscular strain and deep-seated bruising undoubtedly caused by the impact, but only the head injury was serious. McCoy spent a long time fussing around Spock's head, more disturbed than he cared to admit by the quiet way the Vulcan accepted the attention, before deciding that even this injury was almost healed.

He straightened and looked over to where Kirk sat at the desk, clearly controlling the urge to fidget with a considerable effort while M'Benga finished cleaning the deep gouges on his arms. "The physical damage is negligible," he reported. "As for the mental damage, who can say? The brain's a tricky thing. The wonder is that he's alive at all if he forgot everything - a Vulcan body is very dependent on his brain to carry out a lot of the functions that are wholly autonomous in Humans. He could have been operating at infant level, of course..."

"He's relearning quickly - tell him something just once and he remembers it," Kirk reminded him. "He probably picked up a lot - ouch! - in the early stages by experimenting, like a child does."

"If you sat still, Captain, I could finish without hurting you further," M'Benga pointed out.

"Yes - well, hurry up!" Kirk said impatiently.

McCoy ignored the short exchange. "You said he can grasp associations," he said, almost to himself.

"Yes." Kirk, too, was more intent on Spock's condition than his own.

"Then I'd suggest physical rest, either here or preferably in his cabin as long as someone stays with him - "

"I will. I'd be more use there than twiddling my thumbs on the bridge."

McCoy smiled to himself. Jim's picking up some of Spock's habits, he thought. A logical excuse for an emotional motivation. "What makes you think you'd be getting back to the bridge right now, Captain?" he asked. "You're off duty until I'm sure that there's no infection in that arm and that it's healing properly. As for Spock - with the computer going all the time giving him assorted data, he should soon remember learned knowledge; what I can't do much about are the personal experiences, memories...the things that make a man what he is."

"There'll be his personal log," Kirk suggested.

"Yes - that'll help. And as the bruising in his brain heals, he may remember spontaneously, too. Go on, then - get him down to his quarters...and don't get too bored listening to the computer spouting science!"

Kirk grinned a little ruefully, knowing that he would get bored by all the science, but knowing it was necessary - and that it would be well worth it. "Spock - come on, Spock."

He led the Vulcan out. McCoy watched them go, and turned back to re-check his findings. If he was wrong, Spock would probably have to be assigned to a shore position; a man with a faulty memory would never be left on a Starship. But at heart, McCoy was sure that he was right. As the bruising healed, Spock's memory would return in full; all they were doing was speeding up the process.

The surgeon tidied away his scanners and the tapes, and then turned to the less pleasant task of identifying the six skeletons lying in the ship's morgue.

* * Sheila Clark * *

* * * * *

* * * CAVERNS * * *

Trapped in the ravings of my mind,
In the struggle to break free
Upon the boiling lakes rained images of ice and
Of ice and snow
And then a child as one who had been waiting long
And could no longer be contained,
Who showed them only tears of pride
So when the tears stung
They would not see he turned aside to let them fall.
I felt you then, your mind in mine
When for a moment you too burned,
Imperfect Vulcan - alien Human,
Before you bathed me cool.
And in the distance foliage
That wound its cooling ivy green
Around a child's unspoken pain.
Forever lost.
You leave me wanting more of what we shared.
I understand.
In some small way I lived your loneliness.
May you find what you are searching for,
And be at peace.

* * Gillian Catchpole * *

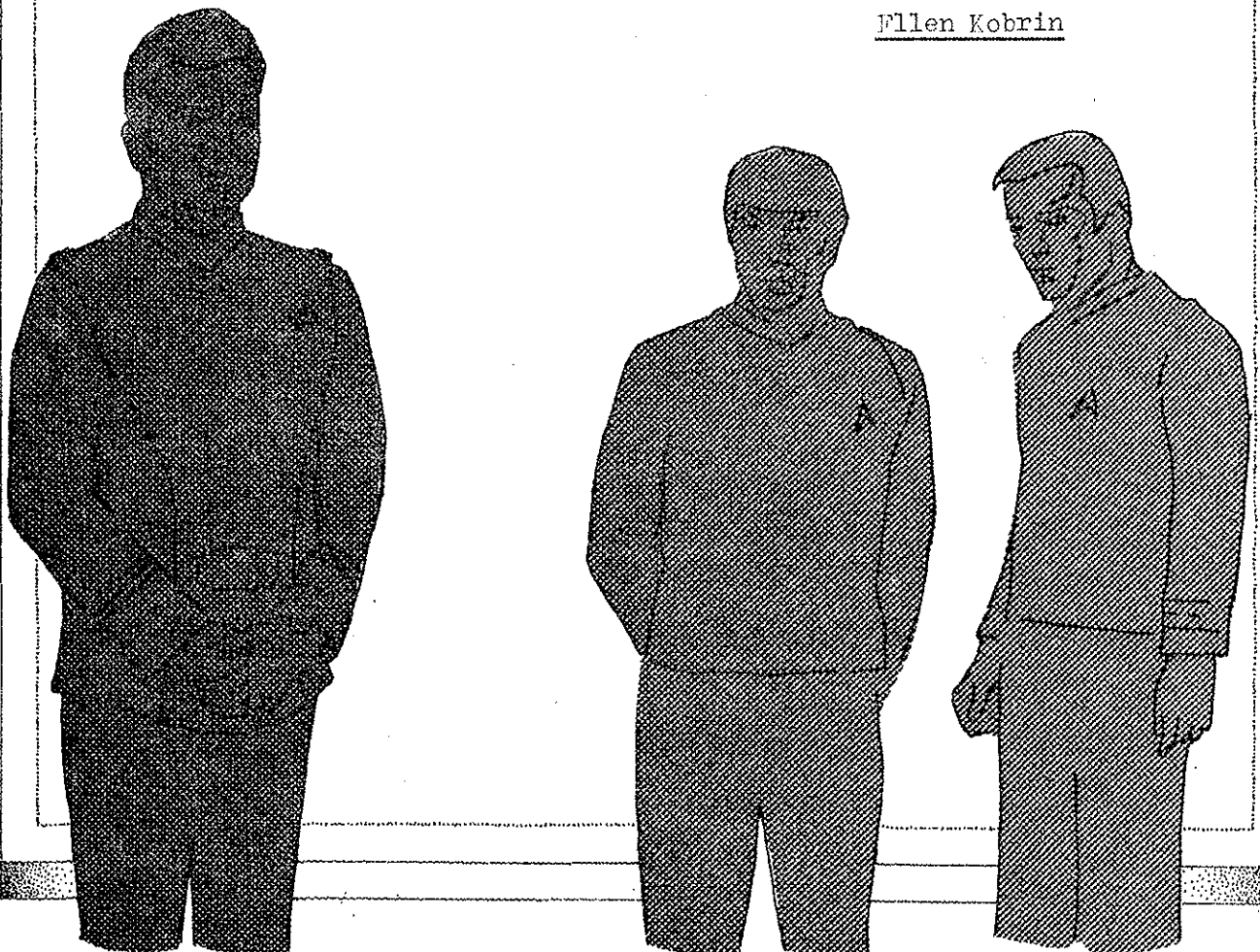
* * * * *

"I think I can find my way, Ensign."

And so I did. Inside the lift, my heart
Is pounding in my throat. With wondering eyes
I greedily absorb the sight, so dear,
Of walls and floor - the same, yet subtly changed.
Then: "Bridge," I say. The lift begins to move.
I quickly close my eyes as memories
Rush in on me, so sharp and clear and bright,
It seems as if one day has passed, not years,
Since last I stood upon this moving deck.
What will I find on reaching my old home?
All those with whom I shared that glorious time
Are still here on the Enterprise, save two,
And Bones will soon be back, although I think
Not without protest. But he will be here.
The other - no, I will not let myself
Think of the fact that Spock, my dearest friend,
Companion through my sorrows and my joys,
Will not be waiting there in his old chair.
I will not think of that. Instead, I turn
My thoughts to what awaits me on the bridge.
When I step through those doors, will someone say
That word I long so desperately to hear?

"Captain! Starfleet just signalled your transfer of command."

Ellen Kobrin



IDIC - INFINITE DIVERSIONS, IMMEASURABLE CONFUSION

by

Elizabeth Butler

Of course, it was all my fault.

Leastways, that's what everyone else maintained. Well, I admit that it was me who suggested we try the maze. I didn't insist, mind - far be it from me to tell my senior officers what to do. And it certainly wasn't my fault that they were all bored stiff in the first place, which prompted me to make the suggestion. Me and my big mouth!

Now I know you're all wondering what in hell I'm goin' on about. No? Hard luck, 'cause I'm gonna tell you anyway!

We'd just finished a particularly gruelling assignment and I'd suggested, in my capacity as Chief Medical Officer of this tub, that the whole crew needed a period of relaxation before someone accidentally blew the ship up, or something equally unpleasant.

"Really, Bones. You're exaggerating," Jim protested.

Now I'm pretty easy going, especially where Jim's concerned - until he presumes to tell me my job.

"Exaggeratin', am I? Well, you just get onto Scotty and ask him to tell you how Lieutenant Abramson just forgot to secure the shielding on one of the reactors. And that's not the only such incident over the last coupla days. Added to which, my sickbay's been overflowin' with cuts, bruises, even a broken arm, all for no apparent reason. Even in my own department, Chris had one of the junior nurses in tears this morning, and that's certainly not like her."

"Okay, okay," Jim capitulated, knowing when he was beaten. "I'll see what I can do."

That's how we happened to wend our weary way to Artemis Dagma - the pleasure planet of the universe. The whole thing had been purpose-built about twenty years ago purely for shore leave for crews of overworked Starships. It catered for everyone - well, almost everyone. I must admit I can't really see Spock whooping it up in a fairground, or going on a pub-crawl, or sunning himself on a beach. Still - you never know. Maybe he'll surprise us all one of these days.

Anyway, to get back to the point. As luck would have it the shore leave rota put Jim, Spock, Chekov, Uhura and yours truly in the same party. At first, Spock had declined shore leave, as usual, but I'm not one to let a golden opportunity pass me by - I insisted. Actually, it still took a direct order from Jim to convince him I was right, but eventually we all beamed down to the surface where, having taken one look at the packed millions (honestly, I'm not exaggerating - well, not much) we opted to stick together.

After a couple of hours of being jostled around this gigantic funfair we were all bored out of our minds - I shudder to think what Spock was feeling - and we were quite ready to pull out our communicators and have ourselves beamed back to our nice quiet Starship.

That's when I saw the sign!

"Pit your wits!

Accept the challenge!

Attempt the impossible!

Enter the Artemis Dagma Maze at your own risk. Once having entered the dome, communicators will prove ineffective due to the special shielding. Successful completion of the course depends entirely on the individual/s."

"Why don't we give that a go?" I suggested, pointing at the sign. "I'm sure that with Spock's brilliant mind and Chekov's navigational skill, we shouldn't have any problem. Should be a cinch."

Jim looked a bit doubtful, and Spock raised an eloquent eyebrow.

"Well, it's either that, or we go back to the ship," I challenged. "We sure as hell aren't enjoying ourselves here, are we? Well, are we?"

The other four exchanged glances.

"How about it?" asked Jim. "Spock?"

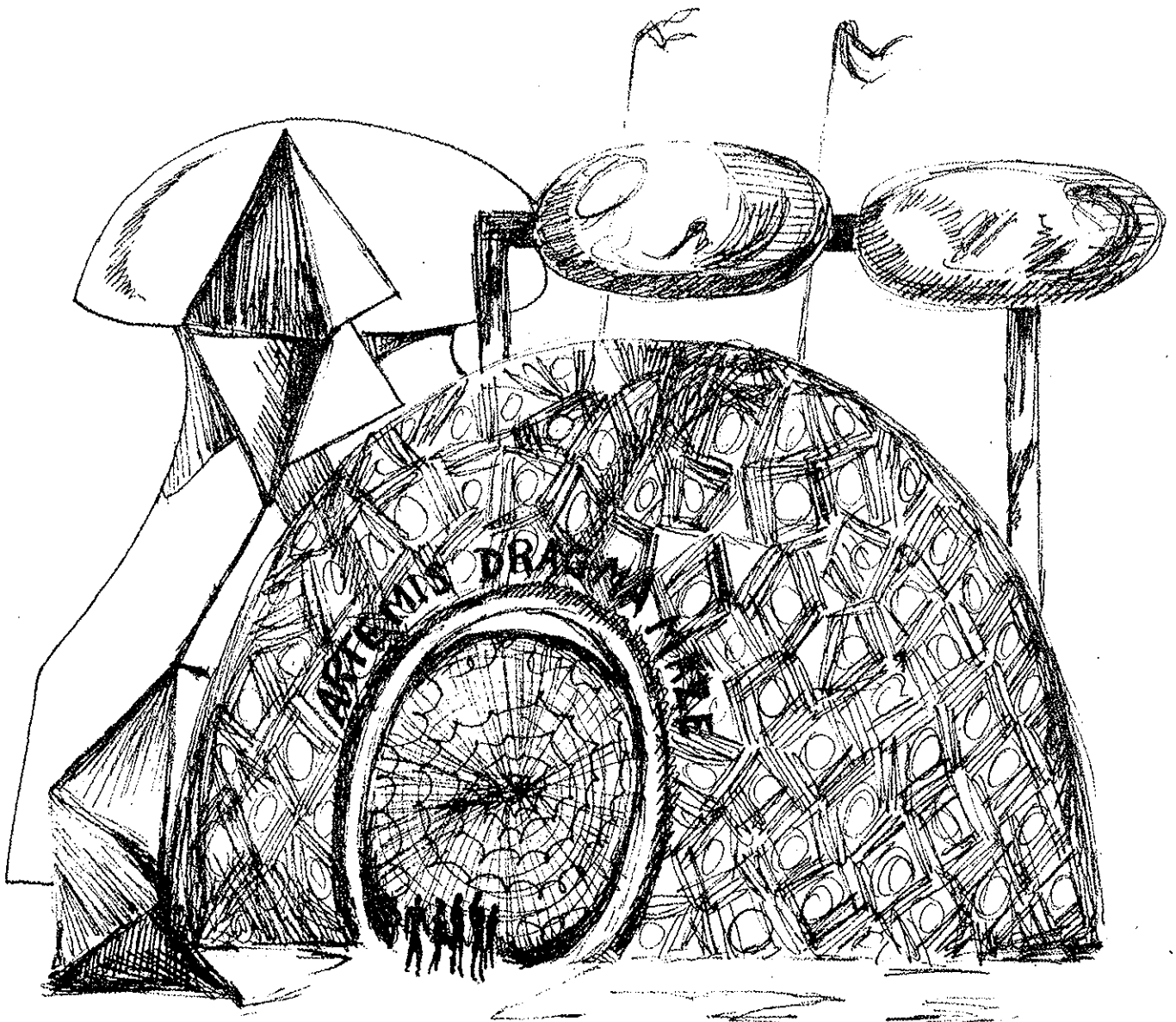
At that precise moment a couple of young Ensigns went careering past like a pair of schoolkids, almost taking our Vulcan friend with them. That must have been the deciding factor.

"Perhaps the idea does have some merit, Jim. It will, at least, serve to get us away from the crowds."

"Chekov? Uhura?"

Now, truth to tell, I think that our two young companions would much rather have gone tearing after the departing Ensigns in search of fun, but their sense of duty and loyalty to their commanding officers prevailed. They chickened out!

"Y-yes, sir," stammered Chekov. "It... should be very interesting, sir."



"Sure, why not? We've nothing better to do."

Liar! Still, the poor girl didn't have much choice - unless she felt like going off by herself.

"Well," said Jim, rubbing his hands together, "that appears to be settled. Come on, Bones. Lead the way. After all, it was your idea."

I must confess here and now that at that moment I had second thoughts. But I sure as hell wasn't gonna back down now, so I resolutely marched across to the entrance, the others following close behind. We paid our entrance fees and stepped into - complete and utter silence.

It was really weird. Either we were the only ones fool enough to come in at all, or everyone else had fallen asleep some place. The maze was the old-style conventional type - privet hedge about eight feet high. There was nothing to suggest that there was any sort of barrier over our heads; the sun shone brightly out of a clear blue sky and we could even hear birdsong, though there were no birds in evidence.

"It's beautiful. Like another world," breathed Uhura.

"Indeed," intoned Spock, looking around him appreciatively. "I believe, Doctor, that this was one of your better suggestions."

"Thanks, Spock," I threw back at him; then, driven by some insane urge, I went on, "I sure hope you all remember that, if we get lost in here."

It was a stupid thing to say, and I could have bitten my tongue out the second I'd said it. Talk about tempting providence! Oh, what the hell! It was only a maze. If we could pilot our way through interstellar space, surely we could manage a simple maze.

"Okay, Spock, which way?" queried Jim.

Spock stood for a moment, deep in thought. "If I remember correctly, I believe the general principle was to take the left-hand turning at every intersection. That eventually leads to the centre, which of course should be easily recognisable as the centre; and from then onward, taking the right-hand turnings should, theoretically, return us to our starting point."

I didn't like the sound of that 'theoretically', and I could see Chekov and Uhura casting speculative glances at each other. Anyway, we started off at a casual pace, relaxing in the warm sunshine, strolling leisurely, enjoying the peace and quiet. It was really rather pleasant, listening to the birds and the soporific hum of insects, and I started congratulating myself on a brilliant idea.

The first stirrings of unrest began manifesting themselves after about an hour; and it was Uhura who eventually plucked up the courage to enquire tentatively,

"Er... Mr. Spock, sir. Shouldn't we be near the centre now? I mean, surely the maze can't be that big. We've been walking now for well over an hour, and it all looks the same to me."

Judging by the expressions on the faces of the others - Spock excepted, of course - the same thought had occurred to everyone.

"Have patience, Lieutenant. No doubt we shall soon reach our objective. We have been walking... rather slowly, you must agree."

Now, most people would tell you that Spock's voice is completely without inflection. Don't you believe it! If you listen carefully enough, you can usually ascertain his state of mind, and right now he was definitely uneasy. Not that he would ever admit it, but we knew, and that made us uneasy.

We continued doggedly on for another half hour or so, then Spock stopped abruptly, and carefully surveyed our surroundings. Not that there was much to survey. As Uhura had so aptly pointed out, it all looked the same - a path

about eight feet wide, bordered on both sides by eight foot high hedges, as far as the eye could see.

Again it was Uhura who voiced the general opinion. Brave gal that! Not many people would question Spock's actions.

"We're lost, aren't we?"

Spock's eyebrows vanished into his hair. "Certainly not! I stopped merely to get my bearings. It is only a question of time. All mazes are mathematically arranged. Once you discover the correct sequence of right or left turns, it is relatively easy to reach the centre."

"Now just hold on there a minute," I started - which was a mistake, because it drew everyone's attention to me. Unfortunate at that particular moment. I mean, it had been at my suggestion that we were here in the first place, but having started, I swallowed my misgivings and brazened it out.

"Didn't you say we had to take the left turning at every intersection? What's all this about the correct sequence of right and left turns? We haven't made any right turns."

"If you remember correctly, Doctor, I stated that the general principle was invariably to take the left turning. It is not, however, an inflexible rule. There are... variations."

"Then this, I take it, must be one of the variations?" Jim's voice was deceptively calm as he looked Spock straight in the eye. "We are lost?"

"No, sir."

"Explain."

"Whilst I do not know exactly where we are in relation to the centre of the maze, it should not be too difficult to arrive back at our starting point by taking all right-hand turnings back from our present position."

Now I must admit that made sense to me, so without more ado we started back the way we had come, at a somewhat brisker pace than we had employed on the way in. In a subtle way, the thought of being marooned in this gigantic living jigsaw puzzle had somewhat dampened our enthusiasm.

The crossroads came as a complete surprise to all of us. We certainly hadn't come across one on the way in.

"Now what?" queried Chekov, looking around perplexedly. "We must have taken a wrong turning somewhere."

"Impossible, Mr. Chekov," Spock insisted emphatically. "We took the left turnings, without exception, on the way in, and the right turnings, also without exception, on the way back."

"So where in hell did these hedges come from? They don't just spring out of the ground and grow to eight feet in a couple of hours, ya know."

"That, I am afraid, I cannot answer, Dr. McCoy. They should not be here at all."

"Well you'd better tell them that 'cause they obviously aren't aware of the fact."

"Really, Doctor, to what end? I fail to see the logic in addressing non-sentient plant life."

"Don't be so smart with me, you... you... literal-minded, computerised, big-headed know-it-all!"

I know, I know. I say some really dumb things when I'm nervous, but he was being supercilious and smug. He knew I didn't mean for him to actually talk to the damn hedges.

All he did, in answer to my tirade, was to look at me in that maddeningly

tolerant manner of his and remark idly,

"As far as I am aware, my cranium is no larger than yours, nor is my internal physiology so vastly different from your own."

"We are not discussing anatomy!" I yelled.

"Then I wish you would endeavour to make your meaning clearer, Doctor. I was under the distinct impression..."

"Gentlemen, please. This is not the time for one of your interminable arguments, no matter how amusing we sometimes find them." Jim was beginning to get annoyed, and not a little anxious. "Bones, stop needling Spock."

Now this was really too much. "Me! Needling Spock? It was him who started it."

"I beg your pardon, Doctor, it most certainly was not. I was merely endeavouring to..."

"Stop it! The pair of you. That's enough!"

When Jim decides to take command of a situation, he takes command! We shut up.

"That's better." He glared warningly at each of us in turn. "Now I suggest we would all be much better employed in trying to find a way out of this place. Any suggestions?"

"Maybe we should try our communicators?" Uhura ventured. "I mean, I know it says on the sign they'll be ineffective, but maybe that's just a blind to make it seem more of a challenge."

"Good point, Lieutenant. At least it's worth a try." So saying, Jim flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

Nothing. Not even a crackle of static. He tried again with exactly the same result. None.

Sighing, he clipped the instrument back onto his belt. "It was a good idea, Uhura, but obviously it wasn't a blind. We can't get ourselves beamed out of here so we'll have to try something else. Mr. Chekov, you're our navigation expert. Do you have any bright ideas?"

If ever there was a case of being put on the spot, this was it. The poor lad turned bright red, shuffled his feet nervously, and proceeded to stare helplessly at the ranks of greenery surrounding us.

"Er... it is very difficult, Captain. Computing a course with instruments on the Enterprise is very different from locating the exit from a maze whilst in the middle of it, sir."

He looked appealingly at Spock, but Jim relented with a smile.

"It's all right, Chekov. I appreciate the circumstances are totally dissimilar. Relax."

"Y-yes, sir. Thank you, sir," stammered poor Chekov, visibly relieved when Jim shifted his attention to a perusal of the four paths surrounding us.

"Why don't we just sit here and wait?" I suggested brightly, and four pairs of eyes turned to stare at me in disbelief.

"Wait? For what, Doctor?"

"Come now, Mr. Spock. Surely you must realise it's the only logical thing to do. This is a maze in an entertainment complex, is it not? Obviously, the idea of a maze is to find your way through it. Now it stands to reason not everyone's gonna be able to find their way. People must get lost sometimes. I mean, if we got lost with you, a Vulcan, in command, so to speak, ordinary simple Humans don't stand much chance, do they?"

You could almost hear the wheels turning in Spock's head as he determined whether or not to feel insulted. He evidently came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth pursuing, and directed his attention to the immediate problem.

"I will concede that there is, in all probability, some form of safeguard system in operation. However, we have no way of knowing just how long we may be compelled to remain here while we wait for possible rescue. I suggest, therefore, that we make some attempt to discover a way out."

Which, roughly translated, meant that our favourite Vulcan did not wish it known that he had managed to get us lost in something as simple as a maze.

We debated on whether to split up and explore a different path each, but decided that this would only compound the problem. It was better to be lost together than alone, after all.

"Okay, folks," Jim began briskly. "Which way?"

Under the circumstances it didn't much matter, so when Spock took the nearest path we all sort of followed him. I lost track of the number of turnings we took, but after another couple of hours it was painfully clear to all that we were hopelessly, irrevocably lost.

"Well, that sure didn't do us much good, did it?" I asked of no-one in particular, from my position flat on my back. I turned my head to observe the prone figures of Jim, Uhura and Chekov. Spock, of course, still looked fresh as a daisy.

"Spock, for heaven's sake will you sit down? You're making me feel uncomfortable. You could at least have the decency to pretend you're as whacked as we are."

"I'm sorry, Doctor. I do not see the necessity for pretence. I assure you, I am perfectly all right as I am."

"Jim, you talk to him. He's driving me up the wall!"

"That is a grossly inaccurate statement, Doctor. There are no walls in the immediate vicinity..."

"Spock!"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Sit down and shut up! That's an order!"

Spock stood thoughtfully contemplating the supine form of our commanding officer for a moment, then reluctantly sat down without further argument. No-one spoke for about five minutes, then...

"Captain."

Jim sighed, and without opening his eyes answered, "Yes, Spock. What is it now?"

"I apologise for disturbing your rest, sir, but I thought I ought to bring to your attention that fact that the light is starting to fail."

Those few words were enough to make all of us forget our exhaustion and sit up abruptly.

"You know, he's right!" I exclaimed.

"Of course I'm right. I am not in the habit of lying."

"Of course not, Spock," put in Jim quickly, with a warning glance at me. "You know as well as I do that Bones wouldn't, for a minute, imply any such thing."

"'Course I wouldn't," I asserted with wounded dignity, and what I hoped was a look of deep hurt.

There was a sound of suppressed giggling from the direction of Chekov and Uhura, quickly quelled by a disdainful look from Spock. We all looked skyward. The sun still shone, but it was much lower in the sky, and starting to turn orange.

"This puts a whole new complexion on things," remarked Jim worriedly. "Being lost in a maze is one thing. It's an annoyance, but not insurmountable. However, the prospect of being marooned here overnight is a different kettle of fish altogether."

"It sure is," I heartily agreed. "A whole new can o' worms."

Spock looked from one to the other of us with barely concealed exasperation.

"Just expressions, Spock. What we mean is..."

"That's quite all right, Captain. I was able to grasp the general purport of your words. I was merely endeavouring to comprehend the employment of completely irrelevant phraseology to convey your perturbation."

That put us well and truly in our place, and I for one felt about five years old. Jim merely looked amused.

"Er... quite." He cleared his throat a little self-consciously. "Well... er, Spock. We obviously have to try and find a way out of this mess. Any bright ideas?"

Spock looked a trifle uncomfortable. "At this precise moment, sir, I have no idea. Bright or otherwise."

"Well, you better think of something quick," I challenged. "You got us into this mess, you get us out of it."

"I got us into this situation? May I remind you, Doctor, it was not at my suggestion that we entered this labyrinth."

"He's right, you know, Bones, you must admit."

"Yes, Doctor," piped in Chekov. "You can hardly blame Mr. Spock. It was, after all, your idea."

I was backed into a corner and I didn't like it. No sir, not one little bit. "Oh, I see, so now it's all my fault."

"Now hold on, Bones. No-one said that."

"Maybe not in so many words, but that's what you're all thinking. It's all my fault we're lost."

Spock sighed patiently. "Apportioning blame serves no useful purpose. I would suggest that our energies be channelled into finding a solution to our predicament."

Only slightly mollified, I lay flat on my back again and stared at the sky for inspiration. Uhura had already assumed a likewise position, and the others sat leaning against the hedges in contemplation.

"We could cut our way through the hedges in a straight line. That way we'd be bound to come to the end of it eventually."

"Don't be silly, Mr. Chekov," admonished Spock. "Even supposing we took your suggestion seriously, what do you suggest we cut through metre-thick hedges with? We did not bring phasers on shore leave, and I do not detect any other instrument that could be utilised for such a purpose. Besides which, there is still the force-field. If you recall, the sign used the word 'dome', which would indicate that the field extends to ground level around the perimeter of the maze."

"I'm... s-sorry, sir. I did not mean... It was only intended as a joke, sir."

"Indeed? I hardly think this is the time for jokes, Ensign."

"No, sir."

Poor Chekov's voice was hardly above a whisper. I felt quite sorry for him. Being put down by Spock is not something to be taken lightly, especially if you're a young and relatively inexperienced Ensign. Even I have sometimes had occasion to be in awe of our Vulcan First Officer. Not often, mind you, but he has his moments.

"A novel idea, though," I chuckled. "Can you just see the face of the manager: of this place, on finding thumping great holes in all his carefully tended hedges?"

"Bones, please," remonstrated Jim, suppressing a wide grin as he caught Spock's disapproving eye. "Don't encourage him. I notice you haven't made any constructive suggestions."

"Neither have you, Jim boy," I came back, quick as a flash.

"Ah. Well, that's one of the privileges of command. Others make the suggestions and I decide whether to act on them or not."

I turned my head slightly to regard him quizzically. I'll say this for Jim - he's a damn good actor. He stared back at me completely straight-faced. I'll swear he's been taking lessons from a certain Vulcan. In the circumstances, I took the only logical course open to me. I stuck my tongue out at him. Childish, I admit, but it gave me immense satisfaction and had the desired effect. It broke Jim up completely, and, laughter being contagious, it was several minutes before any of us felt coherent enough to seriously consider our situation again. Even Spock looked faintly amused. I vow, one of these days, I'll get through that tough hide of his and actually make him smile. A daunting prospect, but I'm not one to give up easily.

Now that the tension had dissipated, we tackled the problem afresh, and that's when I had my brainwave.

"Maybe if one of us could climb on top of the hedge, he might be able to get some idea where we are."

"Doctor McCoy, that is the first sensible thing you have said all day."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. I'm surprised the thought hadn't occurred to you."

Quickly forestalling any retort from Spock, Jim declared, "Brilliant, Bones. Who's going to volunteer?"

Now it's one thing to come up with a brilliant idea. It's quite another to actually volunteer to follow it up. The silence was deafening, to be broken at last by Spock, who casually remarked, "As it was the doctor's suggestion, it is only fair that he be the one allowed to implement it."

You know, sometimes I swear that Vulcan hates me!

It was patently obvious that I had little choice in the matter. Someday I'm gonna learn to keep my big mouth shut and leave the suggestin' to somebody else, especially in the vicinity of Spock.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock," I said acidly, rising slowly to my feet, eyeing the hedge dubiously. "Someone's gonna have to give me a hand up."

Spock stepped forward and inclined his head. "I would be honoured, Doctor McCoy."

I just bet he would! Gingerly I approached and, somewhat unwillingly, balanced my foot in his clasped hands, fully expecting to be hurled over the top.

Have you ever tried climbing a hedge? It's not a pastime I would recommend. For a start, there's nothing to grab hold of. Any bit you clutch comes out to meet you. As I felt myself being hoisted into the air, I made an ineffectual grab at the passing foliage, and crashed heavily onto the top, feeling thousands of little points thrusting their way through my shirt and skewering me.

Obviously, someone had been busy with a hedge trimmer recently, as I found myself lying on a perfectly flat, but none-too-comfortable surface about four feet wide.

"Are you all right, Doctor?" Spock's voice came floating up to me.

"Sure. Great. I always wondered what it felt like to be an Indian fakir lying on a bed of nails."

"Can you see anything?" came Jim's voice.

"Hang on a minute."

I very, very carefully raised myself up onto my elbows and slowly pushed myself back till I was in a kneeling position. It was excruciating. "By the time I get down from here," I yelled, "I'm gonna look like a bloody pin-cushion!"

"Never mind that now," urged my sympathetic Captain. "Just have a look round and see if you can find a way out of here."

"Thank you, Captain, sir. I'll remember your touching concern next time you're in agony."

I balanced carefully and raised my head to look out over the tops of the hedges. And that was all I could see. Miles and miles of green, prickly mattresses. I groaned aloud.

"Something wrong, Doctor?"

"No, Spock, nothing's wrong. Everything's great. We'll probably be here forever, that's all. This maze must extend for miles. I sure can't see any end to it."

"Try looking behind you."

Now, for some strange reason that thought hadn't occurred to me. Not daring to move, I leaned backward slightly, taking the weight on my hands, and twisted my head round. My yells as I swung round must have convinced my friends I had finally flipped.

"Bones! Bones, what's the matter? Are you hurt?"

"Mmmh... I'm... ..hmm..."

"What? Speak up!"

It's not easy speaking through a mouthful of hedge, believe me. In my haste, I had lost balance and fallen head first into the leaves. And prickles! God knows what I looked like at that moment, but I couldn't have cared less. Heedless of the prickles now, I scrambled across to the edge and poked my bloodied face over the top to regard my companions.

"You're not gonna believe this!"

"Doctor McCoy!" Uhura shrieked. "What happened to your face?"

"Oh, don't worry about that," I grinned at her. "It's a mite prickly up here. It's only superficial."

"Bones! What won't we believe? Come on, you may as well tell us the worst."

I grinned wickedly at them. "Do you want the good news or the bad news?"

"Doctor, I hardly think this is the time for playing games. Just tell us what you have discovered."

"Spoilsport!" I scowled at Spock, brushing a little trail of blood out of my eyes. "Well, the good news is, there's only one hedge behind you."

They turned as one man to regard the said hedge, then Spock said curiously, "What is beyond?"

"The fairground," I replied promptly. I raised myself up again and waved

my arms above my head.

"What are you doing, Doctor?" asked a puzzled Chekov.

"Proving a theory. The force field must work like a two-way mirror. We can see out, but folk out there can only see what appears to be a wall. There's a distance of about twenty yards from the outermost hedge to the wall."

"That's great, Bones. What about this bad news?"

"We - ll," I drawled, "as far as I can make out, there aren't any gaps in that hedge. It appears to stretch right round the edge of the maze. Evidently there's only one way in, so unless you want to risk getting lost again..."

"You've gotta be kidding!" interrupted Jim. "No thanks - it's over the top we go."

"Well, before you start going over the top, do you think someone could get me down from here?"

As I touched terra firma again, my 'friends' stood in a circle round me, regarding my battered person with barely concealed amusement.

"Go ahead - laugh!" I flung at them indignantly. "Let's just see how you look by the time you reach the other side of that."

That sure wiped the smiles off their faces.

With only one hedge between us and freedom, the problem now was figuring out the easiest, least painful way over, and here Chekov redeemed himself after his last 'suggestion'.

"If we all took our shirts off and spread them out across the top, it would give some protection at least."

Uhura, having changed into shirt and slacks for shore leave, stepped back a pace, warily.

"All of us?"

I must admit it was a tempting thought, and from the wicked grins on the faces of Chekov and Jim, we were all of one mind. I'll bet Uhura was thanking her lucky stars at that particular moment that she was so dark-skinned - the poor kid was so embarrassed she'd have been bright red all over.

But she needn't have worried. There was a knight in shining armour in our midst, galloping to her rescue.

"Relax, Lieutenant. I'm sure your shirt will not be necessary. Four should be quite adequate for our needs."

Trust good ol' Spock. Always the gentleman. In any event, we wouldn't have made her divest herself of her shirt. Well... not unless it was absolutely necessary, anyway.

She smiled gratefully at Spock, a look of absolute hero-worship on her face. I wish I knew how in hell he managed to have half the women on the ship quite willing to throw themselves at his feet without even trying - worse than that, he didn't even want them. I don't know what the hell he's got that we poor Human males haven't, but if it was marketable, he'd be a multi-millionaire.

I digress.

By mutual agreement it was decided that Spock go first. Someone had to stay on top to lower the first one of us down the other side and haul the last one up this side, and he was obviously the strongest. Having all stripped off our shirts, Jim and I clasped hands to make a hoist for our Vulcan friend, and raised him up. He may be thin, but he 's certainly no lightweight, and by the time he'd leisurely spread out the shirts on the near side of the hedge to his satisfaction, I felt as if my back and arms were permanently out of action. With a supreme effort we managed to heave him up far enough for him to gain a purchase and haul himself the rest of the way.



Now I don't want to dwell on the next half-hour or so - it's too painful, albeit a mite hilarious. Spock had it all worked out. First of all Chekov and I hoisted Jim up, then Chekov, being the lightest, climbed up onto my shoulders and took a firm grip of Spock's ankles, Spock by now lying flat on his stomach across the hedge. Jim, holding onto Spock's hands, slowly lowered himself over the other side till he was far enough down to let go and drop without injury. Chekov, being already balanced on my protesting shoulders, was the next to be pulled up and lowered to Jim on the other side.

Two down, three to go.

I was just about to bend down in order to let Uhura climb onto my back, when Spock forestalled me.

"No, Doctor. You next."

"Me? Are you suggestin' that I climb onto a lady's back?"

"Precisely."

"But... but Spock. I can't do that. It just doesn't seem right. Ladies first, and all that."

"An admirable sentiment, but in this case, impractical. The last person on this side is quite obviously going to have no help to reach the top. Therefore I am going to have to lift that person bodily from ground level. Lieutenant Uhura is considerably lighter than yourself, so it is apparent that she be the one to remain."

He was right, of course, as usual, but that didn't make it any easier for me

to use a beautiful woman as a step-ladder. However, I gritted my teeth and, with an apology to Uhura, got on with it. Getting her across was the most difficult bit.

We eventually accomplished the feat by Jim balancing on Chekov's and my shoulders and lying halfway across the hedge, hanging on tenaciously to Spock's legs. Spock lowered himself head-first over the top till he could grasp Uhura's outstretched hands, then we all proceeded to pull backwards. The top of that hedge is now liberally coated with Human and Vulcan blood and skin, I can tell you, but at least we were over.

Spock gathered up the tattered relics that had once been our shirts and, dropping them to us, proceeded to lower himself far enough down for us to yank him to safety. As we lay sprawled on the ground, we had our first opportunity to survey the damage to our persons, and when I say damage, that's exactly what I mean. None of us had escaped, although Chekov and Uhura had got off pretty lightly. The rest of us looked as though we'd fought a battle with a sabre-tooth tiger. And ~~lost~~! There was hardly a square inch of visible flesh that was not scratched and bleeding. Of course, I had the dubious honour of being the most severely lacerated - poetic justice, ~~the others~~ said later.

Having pulled on what was left of our shirts, we rested for a few minutes before setting off to find the exit. It took a surprisingly short time, and I, for one, felt immeasurable relief on sighting our doorway to freedom.

By unanimous agreement Uhura ventured forward first as she was the most presentable of the party. Finding the coast clear, she beckoned and we rapidly joined her and smartly ducked behind a convenient amusement kiosk. The fewer people who saw us the better. I mean, it wouldn't do for word to get round that a party of Starfleet officers, including a Captain and a Commander - Vulcan at that - were wandering around looking as if they'd been attacked by a berserk barbed-wire fence.

With a sigh of unutterable relief, Jim opened his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise here. Is that you, Captain?"

"Yes, Scotty. Alert the transporter room. Five to beam up immediately."

"Right away, sir."

Within seconds we were safely back on board the Enterprise, where Lieutenant Kyle greeted us in open-mouthed astonishment.

Jim drew himself up and asked with perfect composure, "Something wrong, Lieutenant?"

"N-no, sir. Nothing at all, sir." Kyle stood stiffly to attention, staring straight ahead.

"I'm glad to hear it. I was beginning to think one of us had grown two heads, or something. You don't happen to notice anything unusual about our appearance, do you, Lieutenant?"

Poor Kyle looked at us one by one, a red tinge slowly creeping up his neck. "Er... no, sir. You look perfectly normal to me. I hope you enjoyed your shore leave, sir."

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Kyle. It... made quite a change. I'm glad to hear we all appear perfectly normal to you. I wouldn't like to hear any rumours to the contrary. You do understand, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. Perfectly, sir."

We made a dignified exit and managed to keep it up as far as the turbolift, then we broke up. By the time it dropped us off at Sickbay, we were all in the final stages of hysteria, and practically had to hold each other up. When I say 'we', I mean, of course, all of us except Spock, who stood regarding us with the patient air of an indulgent nursery school teacher at a children's party.

"Oh, Jim," I stuttered, "... that... was priceless. Poor Kyle. I felt quite sorry for him. You deserve an Oscar for that performance. I don't know how you managed to keep a straight face."

"Neither do I," Jim managed at last, gasping for breath.

Into this melee walked the duty nurse, and I thanked all the stars in heaven that it happened to be Christine. Level-headed, loyal, and, above all, she knew when to keep her mouth shut. She stood just inside the doorway, took in the scene at a glance, and said without batting an eyelid,

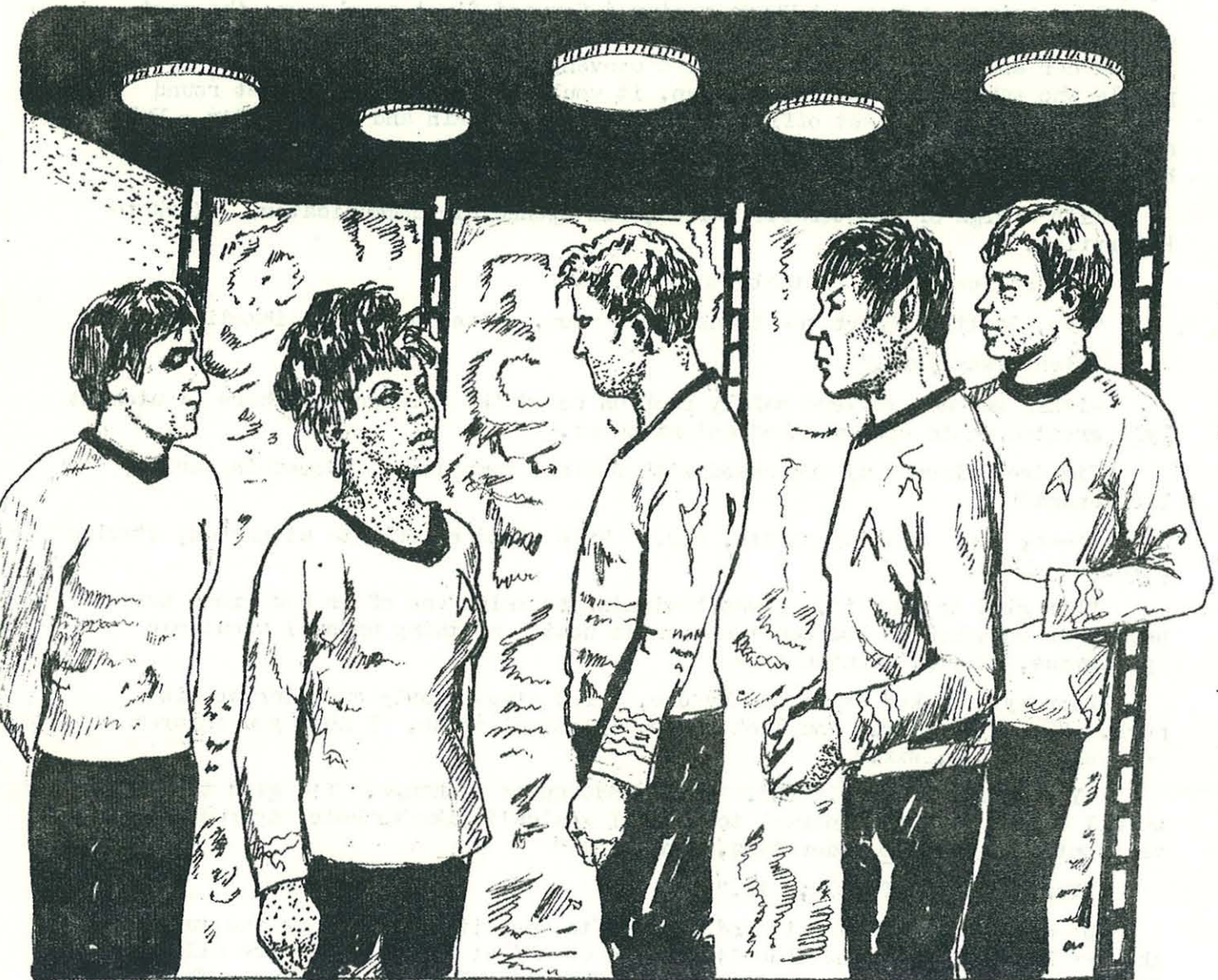
"Good evening, gentlemen, Uhura. Is there anything I can do for you?"

As we were in no fit condition to make a sensible reply, Spock took it upon himself to answer for us.

"Good evening, Nurse Chapel. We... ran into a little trouble on Artemis Dragma, and in the process we appear to have acquired numerous cuts and bruises."

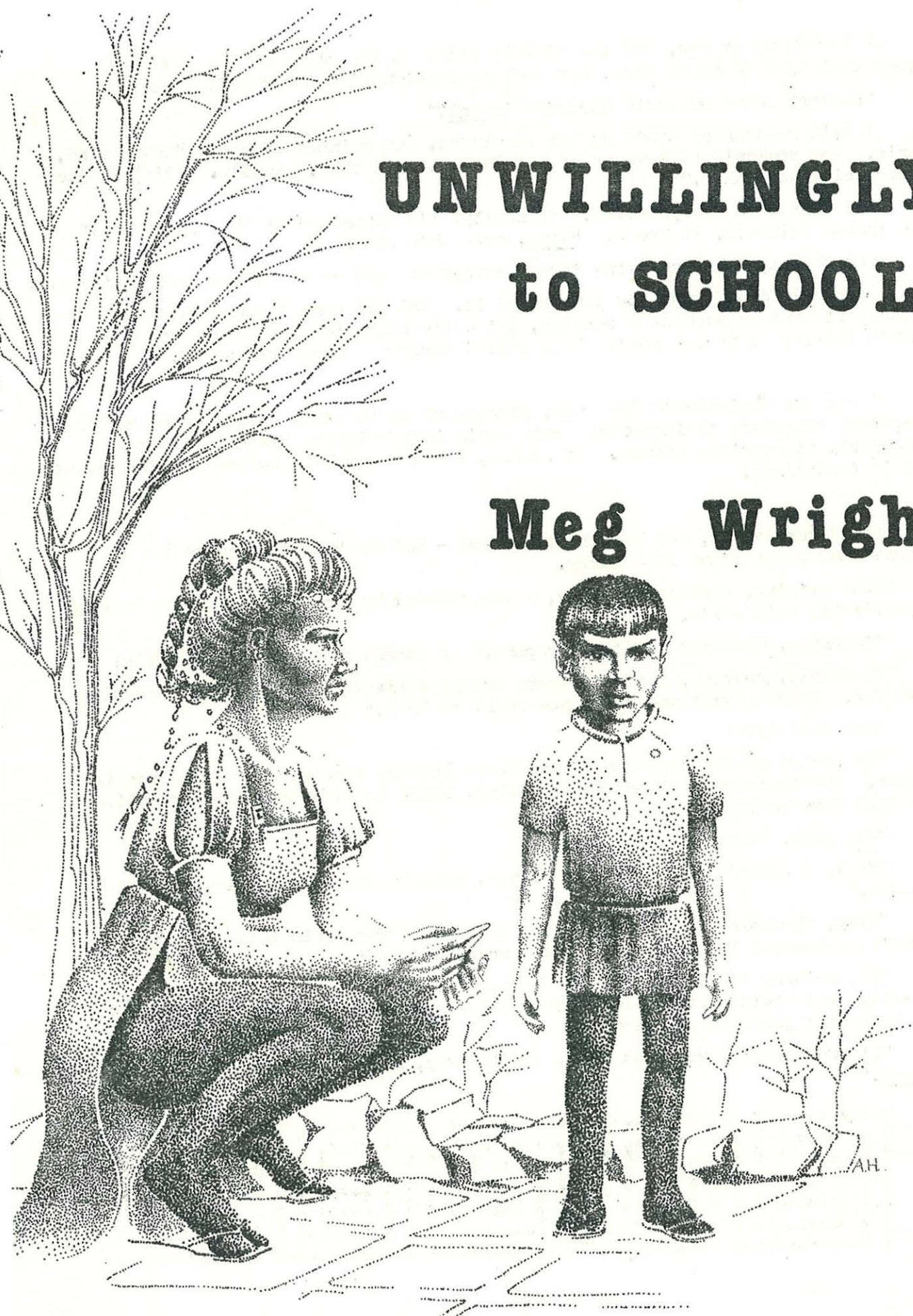
She looked him carefully up and down, suppressing the urge to smile at the gross understatement, then transferred her attention to the rest of us.

"So it would seem." Moving into the room she stopped directly in front of me. "Doctor McCoy. I suggest you all go and have a shower before I do anything about your injuries."



UNWILLINGLY to SCHOOL

Meg Wright



Amanda stared down into the wide brown eyes raised solemnly to hers. Realising this was serious and not something to be shrugged off with a light answer she hunkered down to bring her eyes level with his. Face to face now, mother and son eyed each other gravely.

"Please give me your reasons for not wishing to attend school today, my son."

Spock looked down. It was not necessary, he knew, to hide his feelings from his mother, but he found his own negative reactions embarrassing and wished to turn aside. Amanda had seen many young eyes, Human as well as Vulcan, slide aside from adult questioning, and was unperturbed.

"The question requires an answer, Spock," she prompted.

He looked at her sidelong, gauging her likely response. "The studies required are childish."

"But essential at your stage of development." She had all the pat, Vulcan answers ready for him, this tiny alien child of hers, but inwardly she knew he would be well grown before she lost the Human urge to pull him close to her, settle him on her knee, and sort things out within the loving protection of her arms... but once his telepathic ability had wakened her embrace failed to calm him, for her unshielded, strongly-felt emotions spilled over to him incomprehensibly, increasing his distress. It had been hard to accept, when he was only three, that they had shared their last, sweet, secret, comforting cuddle.

She watched the small, imperious face set stubbornly, the lower lip jutting its defiance. She tapped it fleetingly with her finger.

"My son, unless you can present me with a more convincing argument, we leave this house in one minute's time - and even then we shall be late unless we hurry most mannerlessly."

Spock recognised the tone and regretted that he had spoken impulsively. If he had given himself time to think there would surely have been some way to have avoided the distasteful hours ahead of him. He drew a sigh that seemed to come from the soles of his soft boots and resigned himself to the inevitable.

Amanda acknowledged his capitulation with a tiny pat of approval. "Then get your jacket on and we will leave."

She watched him walk through the doorway to the big, bright classroom, a faint worry-line creasing her forehead. He had made no further objections on their short walk to the school, but he had not trotted at her side as he usually did, but had lagged two or three steps behind her all the way, as if to put off the unpleasant moment of arrival as long as possible. He went in without demur, pausing for that brief, surreptitious last look back at her that was their silent alternative to the forbidden goodbye kiss, but it was obvious that he was not happy. She turned away. Maybe it was a passing thing, and tomorrow all would be well; if it was not, she would deal with it then.

He was silent when she went to collect him, very correct and in what she privately called his ultra-Vulcan mood. However, once the garden gate had closed behind them he exploded into boisterous activity, and seeking out I-Chaya,

clambered onto his back, goading him round and round the garden in the midday heat until she went out to protest.

He looked at her patiently. "I-Chaya doesn't mind, Imi."

"In this heat?" The old animal's fur must be fully six inches long. Amanda could feel her own clothes already beginning to stick to her back out here in the full sunlight.

"It is not so very hot today," Spock told her, "and he truly does not mind."

She looked from one pair of brown eyes to the other, both fixed on her in affirmation of the child's statement. There was nothing to do but give in gracefully.

"Very well. I suppose you both know best."

"But it is too hot for you, Imi," he said firmly.

"All right, I'm going." She smiled teasingly for one brief second and went back into the cool, air-conditioned food preparation area to finish making her thusha sauce, still watching him through the window.

They had their usual light lunch together before he went to his room to work on a logic problem Sarek had shown him the previous night. By bed-time she had almost forgotten her worry of the morning and did not feel it necessary to mention it to her husband - the child had been so obviously content during the rest of the day.

She went into his room last thing, just to be sure, smiling as she looked down at him - sleeping with all the fierce concentration of the very young - and crept away, closing the door behind her.

The following morning, Spock reported a headache.

She looked at him thoughtfully for a long moment and then patiently took him through the ritual for the relief of light pain.

"If it is not successful then a visit to the Healer is indicated."

Spock's silence showed he knew when he was beaten.

He was quiet again on their short walk to school that morning, not peppering her with questions as he normally did, and he did not look back at her as he walked into the classroom.

So - she had let him down, failed to employ her omniscience to diagnose his troubles and put them right, and now he was punishing her for it. She smothered a smile. Vulcan or Human, children were very alike.

That afternoon she asked his help in the preparation of vegetables for the evening meal, encouraging him to talk to her about his school.

"You were pleased this season when we came to live in ShiKahr and you were able to go to school at last," she reminded him. "Has it been all that you expected?"

He tilted his head considerably. "It is all right."

"'All right' is imprecise. Specify what pleases you."

"T'Ulisa tells us a story at the end of the morning."

"A story?"

"Yes. Not like yours, though. She does not know any of them at all - I asked her. I thought grown-ups knew everything."

"Not quite." She hid her amusement at the disillusionment in his voice. "Try not to break that collordon into quite such small pieces, my son... about as long as your thumb will do. I learned my stories from my mother when I was small and lived on Earth."

"I like your stories." Spock held up a piece of collordon for her inspection and added honestly, "But I like hers also."

"What are they about?"

"All sorts of things," he answered vaguely. Catching her eye upon him he said hastily, "Today it was about the lematya and how it cares for its young ones, and yesterday about the sandrat that lives in the desert, and the day before about the ngrali bird, and the day..."

"I see." She interrupted him firmly, knowing his ability to recall all the details right back to his first day there if need be. "And are they always about animals?"

"No. Sometimes she tells us about Surak. I'd like to have been in the desert with him, Imi, and faced the warriors like he did."

"And what else do you like at school?"

"Structure apparatus - but there's never enough time to finish in and then you have to put it away."

"What did you make today?"

"T'Ulisa said to make a dwelling, so I tried to make a house like yours when you were little, like the picture in my room."

Knowing her son's eidetic memory and his passion for details she said, "But that would take you hours to complete. Why didn't you choose something simpler?"

"Vulcan dwellings are too easy," he said flatly.

She eyed him thoughtfully; was it possible that his manual dexterity differed from, or even exceeded, that of Vulcan children? She had never thought to check, had assumed that if there was something in him that did not compare with the Vulcan norm Sarek would have mentioned it.

"You could make a house after we finish this," she suggested, "unless your father has suggested a task."

"Only simple number work." Spock's eyes were shining. "I can work them in my head while I make it, Imi. Oh!" His face fell again.

"What's wrong?"

"I have not enough pieces. I would not be able to complete all the... I have forgotten the word... the windows in the roof."

"Dormers. How many more pieces would you need?"

It took him only a moment or two to make the calculation. "Sixty-three."

"That's very precise," she teased.

He blinked at her. "You asked me how many..." he said uncertainly.

"True - but I didn't realise you'd know how many you already had."

He frowned. "But if you do not know, how can you tell if you have lost one?"

"Do you know how many you have of everything?" she asked curiously.

"Of course. Are there any more of these to do now?"

"No. Go and wash your hands, then you may order the new pieces you need. They should arrive before you have completed the house."

"I may order them myself?" For a moment a Human child's excitement peeked out and was firmly thrust back. Since the never-to-be-forgotten day that Spock had punched orders for every commodity known to his five-year-old mind into the household requirements outlet, he had been forbidden to enter the computer room alone. It had taken an almost-giggling Amanda and an outwardly-calm Sarek some fifteen minutes to explain to the bewildered supervisor that the goods had been ordered in error and were not actually wanted.

"You don't make the same mistake twice," she said. "off you go."

The house was delightful; he worked on it with close concentration, completing it just before his father returned home. Amanda peeped in on him once or twice, proffered advice once when it was asked for, but otherwise left him alone. Her heart ached for his solitary contentment; it was not right that he should prefer the solitude of home to the companionship of his peers.

She went to his room again that evening, sitting for several minutes on the chair she still kept by his bed, and wondering how best to help him. When she came out she found her husband waiting for her, and sensed his disapproval. She put her fingers up to his.

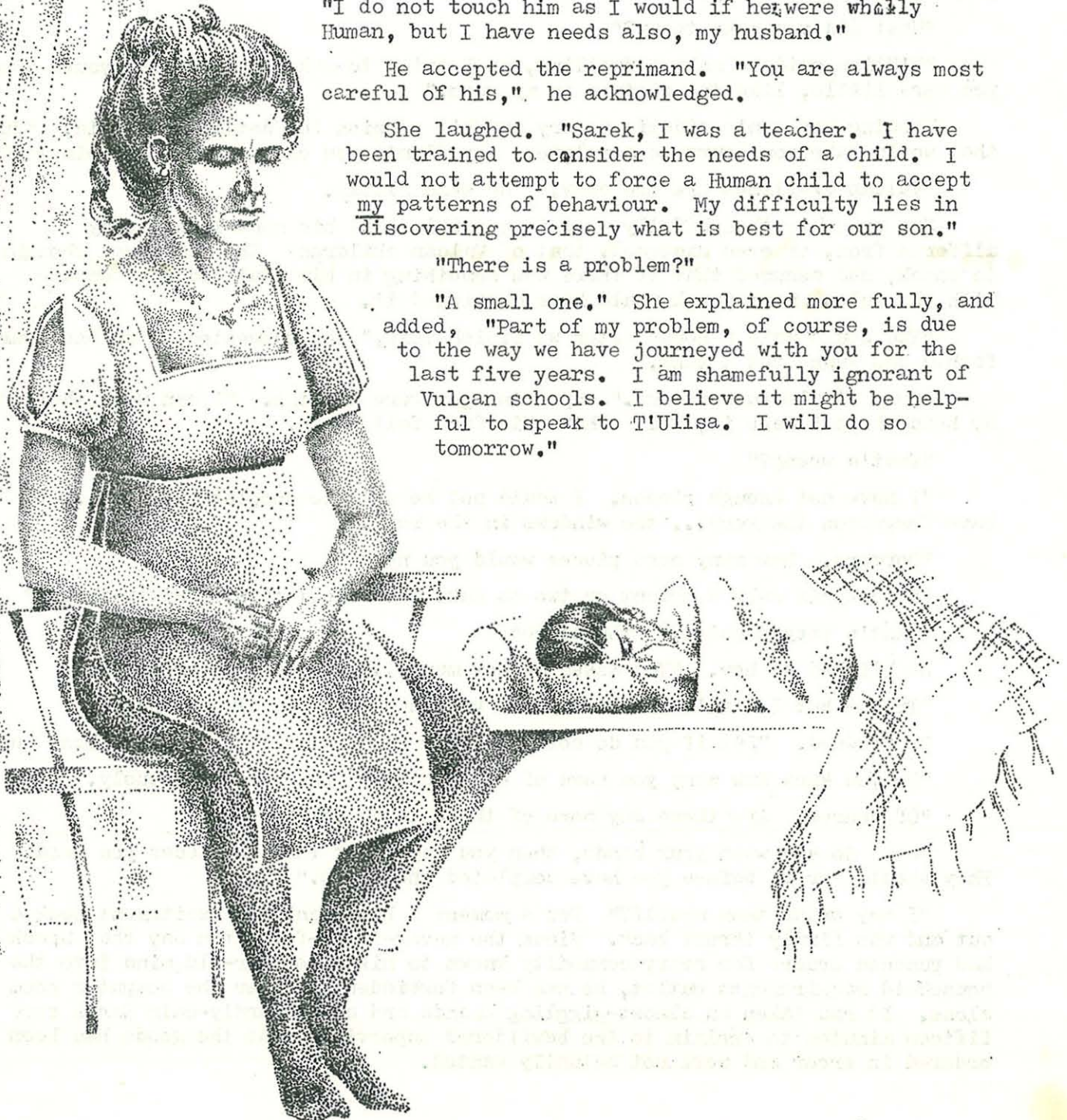
"Sarek, he is my son as well," she said gently. "I do not touch him as I would if he were wholly Human, but I have needs also, my husband."

He accepted the reprimand. "You are always most careful of his," he acknowledged.

She laughed. "Sarek, I was a teacher. I have been trained to consider the needs of a child. I would not attempt to force a Human child to accept my patterns of behaviour. My difficulty lies in discovering precisely what is best for our son."

"There is a problem?"

"A small one." She explained more fully, and added, "Part of my problem, of course, is due to the way we have journeyed with you for the last five years. I am shamefully ignorant of Vulcan schools. I believe it might be helpful to speak to T'Ulisa. I will do so tomorrow."



Perhaps Spock had been given hope by her gentle questioning the previous day; at least he made no objection to setting off for school, but once again he disappeared without looking back - whatever was troubling him was clearly not yet off his mind.

She made a formal request for an interview with T'Ulisa and waited patiently in the small, plain office until the teacher had time to spare for her. The door was open, and she could hear the quiet murmuring of voices, the occasional rustle of movement. There was none of the boisterous activity nor the raised, excitable voices of a Human school here, though from her knowledge of her own son she assumed that Vulcan children were ready for more cerebral pursuits than Human children of a comparable age. If Spock's development was normal it seemed a six-year-old Vulcan would be at about the same standard of intellectual attainment as a seven or eight-year-old Human, possible even older, for Spock had been reading fluently for some months now.

She sighed, wishing she was better acquainted with the attainments of small children, but her teaching had been with older ones. It was possible, of course, that Spock was way behind his full-blooded contemporaries and finding life difficult on that account. She saw a shadow moving along the corridor and rose politely to her feet as T'Ulisa entered the room.

They exchanged formal greetings and Amanda came, quite correctly, straight to the point of her visit.

"My son has been a little reluctant to come to school these last three days. Do you know of any special problems he has that I can help with?"

"Reluctant?" T'Ulisa's brows rose in mild surprise. "He is a quiet child, but I have not noticed anything that he finds difficult."

"Quiet?" Amanda could barely disguise her astonishment.

T'Ulisa registered the surprise and, being in agreement with it, said so. "I myself expected him to show more evidence of his Human blood that he does, but he is very quiet, at times almost subdued."

Amanda experienced an odd sense of precognition. How many parents had she seen express disbelief over the different character their child displayed away from the home environment? But all the same - Spock, subdued? She was not at all sure she cared for the sound of that, no matter how satisfactory it was from a Vulcan point of view.

"It is possible, of course," she said carefully, "that he is unable to cope with some of the tasks that he is given. Perhaps he takes refuge in silence because he does not like to claim your attention."

"That would be most illogical behaviour," T'Ulisa said calmly.

"Perhaps," Amanda said with even more care, "my attempts to follow Vulcan tradition have not been as successful as I hoped and I have not yet helped Spock to see that such restraint would be illogical."

T'Ulisa smiled faintly. "It has been most gratifying to see how much you have achieved with the child, Amanda. I do not believe you need concern yourself in that direction."

Amanda inclined her head in grave acceptance, restraining a strong urge to shake the young woman in front of her and yell, "Then what the hell is bugging my son?"

It occurred to me also that his Human blood had retarded his intellectual development," T'Ulisa said placidly.

Amanda thought, Thanks very much, but remained silent. She knew T'Ulisa had not intended the remark as an insult, merely as a statement of a possible fact. It was well known that, on average, Vulcans were brighter than Humans, though they could often be overtaken by the Human ability to reason laterally and their occasional illogical reliance upon intuition.

"As a result of that," T'Ulisa continued, "I took care to notice his work particularly, and I have always found him to be fully competent to do what he has been set."

Amanda frowned. "But don't you test their intellectual quotient by some more accurate means?" She saw T'Ulisa's look of surprise and said, "Oh, I know I.Q. alone is not the only standard one goes by, but it is a helpful guide to what they might achieve."

"He will be tested next year, of course," T'Ulisa assured her.

"Next year? Won't it be a little late by then?"

"Formal education does not begin for over four more seasons, after all."

"Formal education?" Amanda knew her mouth was agape. "But Spock started to read when he was four and has been fluent since he was five and a half."

"Five? But that is quite exceptional." T'Ulisa eyed the Human woman a moment then said quietly, "Forgive me, but are you certain he can do so? Sometimes a parent mistakes a child's ability to recall the words that have been read to him for an ability to make sense of the written word."

"I am aware of that. No, I am not mistaken. You see, although I speak Vulcan with reasonable fluency, I have been much slower at deciphering written Vulcan. In effect, Spock has been helping me to learn. I think he was rather ashamed of having a mother who could only read books in English and Federation Standard."

"T'Ulisa almost became animated. "But did you not find it strange that he should read so early?"

"Five isn't particularly early," Amanda said. "I could read myself when I was four."

"It is extraordinarily early for a Vulcan child, however. Of course," T'Ulisa was nearly smiling, "it is quite logical when one thinks about it. The Human life span is so much shorter, development would be faster than it would be for us. We do not expect a child to read much before he is seven, and usually later."

"It never even occurred to me he might be bored," Amanda said thoughtfully. She controlled a sudden smile with difficulty. And just why had Sarek never mentioned that his son showed every sign of being a high achiever? She would have more than a few things to say to him this evening!

"Am I to understand that since formal education does not commence for another four seasons, that you do no reading or number work at all at this stage?"

"Preparatory work only, just the foundations are laid, unless we find that a child is ready for more. You mention number work - precisely what has Spock done?"

Amanda explained the basic computer work that Sarek had introduced Spock to, and her own work with him in more old-fashioned areas. "He has always been fascinated by numbers," she said. "He was much more at home with them at first than he was with reading."

T'Ulisa was openly surprised at the child's ability and astounded at her own lack of insight. "I must apologise to you; it is unforgiveable of me not to have realised how advanced Spock is."

Suddenly Amanda understood. "He does not like to be different," she said softly, swallowing down the sudden ache in her throat. "Children can be very protective towards their parents at times. He does not yet quite understand why people are... curious about him, he only knows that it has something to do with me."

T'Ulisa nodded. "It will never be easy for him," she said sympathetically. She saw Amanda look at her and added placidly, "Forgive me. Working with the

young and still emotionally unstable, I am occasionally too open. Perhaps it would be sensible for you to come and watch the children for the rest of the morning - to see for yourself what they do, and then together we can work out something that will be satisfactory for him."

Spock was surprised to see his mother enter the room - surprised, and a little resentful. He took a quick look about him and saw the other children all staring at her. His resentment grew. Why did other people always have to look at Imi like that...? As though pretty golden hair and round ears were odd! He tucked his head down, concentrating fiercely on his drawing; unable to get the tail quite right he frowned hard, recalling the picture Imi had shown him, and made a slight correction. That was better. He leaned back with a satisfied sigh.

"What is that?"

He looked round at Sotal. "What is what?"

"That!" His friend pointed scornfully at Spock's drawing. "That animal with a tail in its head."

"It is an elephant. An Earth animal. Don't you know anything?" Spock retorted with equal scorn.

"Not even Humans would be so silly as to have a silly animal like that."

"It is not silly," Spock hissed angrily.

"Then why does it have its tail on its face?" Sotal demanded reasonably.

"It does not. You are silly. That is its nose."

Sotal stared at him in disbelief. "You made it up," he said accusingly. "I shall tell T'Ullisa you are drawing silly, made-up animals."

"It is not made-up." Spock said it far too loudly and saw faces begin to turn their way. Hot with embarrassment he whispered, "It is better than your silly old picture, anyway. Babies can draw houses with flat roofs." He flicked the drawing contemptuously with one finger, and watched in unconcealed horror as it shot along the polished surface of their table and floated to the floor at T'Ullisa's feet.

The two boys exchanged angry looks out of the corners of their eyes.

"T'Ullisa, Spock just knocked Sotal's drawing on the floor," T'Jai said virtuously.

Both boys turned their glares on her; they had never liked T'Jai.

"It was an accident," Sotal said.

"And Sotal said Spock's drawing was silly." T'Jai was obviously going to exact a just revenge for the way they always kept her out of things. She snatched at the paper. "And it is. It's just a silly, made-up animal."

Spock had had enough. He stood up so abruptly that his chair fell over. The sudden, unexpected clatter shocked the whole room into stillness. Forgetting his mother's presence, the carefully taught lessons in control, he yelled, "It is not a silly made-up animal, it is an elephant. You are silly, T'Jai, you don't know anything." He grabbed at the picture and tore it rapidly into pieces. "There, it is gone, and it doesn't matter any more."

He turned his back on everyone defiantly, quickly scrubbing the back of his hand across his eyes.

Amanda controlled a strong urge to laugh and cry at the same time; maintaining a steadfast air of calm she watched T'Ullisa cross the room to the small, stiff figure and lay a gentle, calming hand on his shoulder.

"A pity to have torn it up, Spock. I should have liked to have seen your drawing - I saw an elephant once myself, when I visited Earth."

"You did, T'Ulisa?" Sotal said disbelievingly. "Is it a real animal?"

"Of course it is. Spock knows a lot about Earth animals, don't you, Spock? Will you draw another one so I can see it?"

"If you like." He still did not turn round, but T'Ulisa's projected calmness was helping his control.

"Yes, please. Place the torn bits in the 'chute, unless you wish to keep them, and then get some more paper. There will be just time if you are quick. Sotal, come and get your picture too, and remember that you must always keep an open mind if you are not sure of your facts. There are a great many animals in the galaxy much stranger than a Terran elephant."

She turned away from them again, leading Amanda to the large cupboard where the learning apparatus was kept. Vulcan toys did not differ so very much from Terran ones, of course, at this stage of development; there were no areas set aside for the encouragement of imaginative play, though, so vital to the growing Human's assimilation of the world about it, but not employed on Vulcan. T'Ulisa explained that although the ability to reason adequately was not fully developed until the child was over seven, until then it was possible for them to erase distressing or misunderstood experiences by the employment of simple meditational exercises in conjunction with their parents. It was Amanda's greatest regret that she could not help Spock in this way, and that when Sarek was unavoidably away, the boy's grandmother had to help him. Once the processes of deep meditation and of self-examination were gradually begun, the child coped with traumas in that way.

T'Ulisa noted Amanda's eyes slide worriedly to Spock, who was now drawing again with the tip of his tongue protruding slightly as he bent over his work, giving it his whole attention.

"Please don't be concerned," she begged softly. "The incident is unimportant - although I begin to see why you were surprised when I said he was quiet."

"His father is most concerned when he cannot control." Amanda did not mean to say the words, but somehow they were out without volition.

"Perhaps because he sees the child's intellectual maturity and does not appreciate that his Human genes will have an effect upon his emotional growth also," T'Ulisa said.

"I do not believe he even realises Spock is advanced," Amanda said guiltily, "and I presumed that he was probably behind his peer-group."

"Parents are all too often unaware of precisely what standards to expect," T'Ulisa said severely. "Of course, it is impossible to lay down absolutes where child development is concerned, but it is logical to have some idea of what the norm is. We cannot always rely on our own memories of childhood, for they are often distorted because the facts were incompletely understood. However, in Spock's case it must always have been difficult to know what to watch out for."

There was a bustle behind them as T'Ulisa's assistants were overseeing the clearing of the room while the children busily stacked tables tidily, collected up pencils and coloured chalks. Amanda felt a pull at her long over-mantle, and looked down.

"Imi, must you stay?" Spock's face was a study in agonised embarrassment imperfectly controlled.

She knelt down swiftly. "Does it mean that much that I go?"

"Yes. Please!"

"Very well. If it is that important, I'll go." Her eyes expressed understanding, but also a certain steely determination to find out why. She stood up. "Thank you, T'Ulisa. My visit has been very informative."

The Vulcan woman came out with her. "I find that most interesting," she said slowly. Amanda raised enquiring eyebrows. "We are about to practice the dances the children will perform at the Glah'kerfal... you know of the festival?"

"I was present once, yes, when Spock was a baby. Since then we have been off-planet."

"All the children will be involved - you know, of course, that we set much store by the discipline and coordination of our ritual dances."

"Indeed."

"When he first came, Spock was very interested. It was new to him, and he was eager to learn. Lately, though, he has been performing very badly. So badly I was beginning to think we might have to excuse him in case he spoilt the dances for all the other children."

And that's probably what he's aiming at, Amanda thought, chuckling inwardly. The little rascal.

Aloud, she said, "You have not told him you were going to excuse him?"

"No. We thought he might be disappointed." Understanding dawned on T'Ulisa's face. "You mean... it is deliberate?"

Amanda could not help a tiny laugh at the horrified amazement in the formerly calm voice, more particularly at the undertone of unwilling admiration.

"The deviousness of Humans is well-known throughout the galaxy," she said. "For the moment, will you leave it in my hands?"

T'Ulisa nodded, her eyes showing her amusement. "Very willingly indeed. It would seem that this is an area in which you are better qualified than I."

Out of school, Amanda went to the botanical garden close by. It was almost time to collect Spock, and it would be a pleasant place to wait. There were a few seats provided for the benefit of the elderly - or outworlders who might wish to sit and enjoy the pleasant surroundings. She found one in a shady spot close to the entrance and sat down to think things over.

If Spock was bored it could explain a lot... but it could not explain that look on his face when he asked her to leave. He had known she would understand what T'Ulisa did not... but did she? She thought back to the one time, four years ago, when she had attended the Glah'kerfal with Sarek... The children's dances had been charming, the solemnity of the young faces a delight. They had been guests of Stakk and T'Elwe, and their son had been dancing that day. She laughed to herself, remembering how T'Elwe had enquired about Human customs, and she had tried to picture her small nephews' faces if they had been asked to perform such exacting and dainty steps when their prime interest lay in noise, dirt, spaceships and the acting out of fierce, inter-galactic battles.

Spock had never conformed to any such Human norm, but equally it appeared that he was not an average Vulcan either; as always he seemed to be on some indefinable interjacent point, and she wondered unhappily whether he would always have to walk along a tight-rope, always unbalanced, constantly tipped this way and that by the warring sides of his nature. It seemed such a selfish burden to have laid upon their dearly-wanted child that for a moment she was rent by guilt, closing her eyes over the hot prickling threat of tears.

Illogical! She had absorbed enough of her husband's culture not to indulge herself with vain regrets and unhelpful self-blame. What was, was - and must be dealt with. She got calmly to her feet; the need for outward serenity brought some measure of inner peace as she walked back to the school to collect her son.

On their way home a sudden impulse made her say, "You are a sensible boy, Spock. Would you like to be permitted to walk to school by yourself?"

"Without you?" The dark eyes widened.

"Be logical - if I am with you, you cannot be by yourself," she teased, then went on softly, "You are not a baby any more, so we must not treat you as though you were."

"I should like that." His face lit in a smile, checked at once when she shook her head admonishingly, but the brown eyes were still shining. He studied her face for a moment as they walked along, and then offered, "But you can come with me sometimes if you would still like to."

Astounded, she stared down at him, hardly believing a six-year-old could be so perceptive of her own sense of loss. Equally seriously she said, "I should like that... sometimes."

Spock was so inwardly enchanted by this recognition of his increasing self-reliance he positively danced through the garden and up to the house once the entry gate was safely closed behind them, and it was only when he saw his mother watching him that he recalled sending her away so that she would not see him doing the Glah'kerfal steps so badly. Guiltily caught in mid-motion he half stumbled, awkwardly off balance, and went down with a hefty crash across a low stone wall.

The sudden sharp jab of stone against his knee was exquisitely painful, and he'd let out a quick yelp of pain before he could prevent it. He bit his lip hard and scrambled clumsily to his feet.

"We'd better get that scrape cleaned up," Amanda said cheerfully. "Come on."

Spock limped along behind her, not so much because the knee was painful - although it was - but because he was bent over trying to see through the rent in his trousers so that he could watch the fascinating green trickle as it slid down his knee.

Amanda put out a hand to prevent his head impacting with the door-frame, saying automatically, "Look where you're going. You'll do yourself a real injury if you're not careful."

Inspiration flooded him. He straightened himself up and limped dramatically behind her, favouring his injured leg and schooling his face to a stern stoicism.

Amanda's lips twitched involuntarily as she watched him coross the tiled floor of the downstairs wash-room. "Is it as bad as all that?" she asked gravely.

"Oh, it's not too bad," he answered heroically.

She fetched a sterile pad, pushed up the loose trouser leg, and applied the antiseptic gently. He managed a convincing wince.

"Did that hurt?"

"Not much - but I don't think I'll be able to do dancing tomorrow, p'raps not the day after." There, it was out. He darted a swift look up at her under his lashes.

She applied a dressing and then took his chin in her hand, turning his face up to hers. "One thing you will have to learn, my son, is that Vulcans make very poor liars! Now, go and change those torn trousers and get ready for lunch."

Crestfallen, he trailed from the room, shoulders drooping listlessly. Amanda suppressed another smile as he went past her, and gave the final blow to his dignity with a tiny swat on his backside.

"Hurry up... and after luch, we'll talk."

He looked back at her, hope clearly written on his face. "Really talk?" Perhaps Imi would make it right after all.

"Really talk," she promised.

They went into the cool shade of the conservatory on the north side of the

house after lunch and busied themselves pricking out plants - it was a job Spock particularly enjoyed; one which his nimble fingers were deft at, and which was pleasant to do out of the heat of the day, with the tiny fountain in one corner playing a cool, splashing accompaniment to the quiet sounds filtering in from the surrounding city.

As Amanda lifted a tray of seedlings down for him she asked, "Why have you suddenly decided you don't like dancing?"

He put his head on one side. "It is undignified."

"I have only seen the Glah'kerfal dances once." She handed across a small trowel. "I don't seem to remember anything undignified in the dancing - I seem to recall that it was most formal and correct. We'll plant those in that corner over there. Yes, behind those little yellow ones - these will grow taller. Do you mean the dances are undignified or that it is beneath your dignity to perform them?"

"I am not a baby," he said firmly. "Just here?"

"That's right. Neither is Sotal, and I presume he does not find them undignified."

"Sotal is so a baby," he muttered.

"I thought he was your friend."

"Well, he is, but he doesn't know anything."

"No-one likes an intellectual snob, my son."

He savoured the new phrase. "What is an intellect'al snob, Imi?"

"IntellectUal." She spoke it slowly for him. "Someone who thinks he is important because he knows a lot of things."

The fleeting smile showed he understood her. "No, Imi," he said meekly.

"So you think the dances are babyish... Anything else?"

"Father does not dance."

"Father danced in the Glah'kerfal when he was six."

Spock absorbed that silently and, failing completely in his attempt to visualise Sarek as anything other than a grave, rather stern adult, said, "Girls like to dance; they like to be graceful."

"And boys like being clumsy, I suppose," she said drily, pointing at his knee.

He eyed her indignantly; she wasn't being fair. Backed into a corner, he dragged out a phrase he recalled Sarek using only the other day.

"It is irrelevant to my future studies."

Amanda gave a tiny, choking gasp and rose to her feet in a hurry. It was unfair to laugh at the child, unkind as well, but there were times when the sheer incongruity of the formal Vulcan speech patterns overcame her control.

Biting her lip she went to the fountain for water and said over her shoulder, "Dancing is an excellent method of learning coordination and discipline, both of which are always necessary for us all."

He gave a long sigh, seeing he was not going to win. It seemed so unfair - grown-ups made all the rules, always had the last word. He took the can of water she held out and sprinkled it over the plants, careful not to spill or waste a single drop; when the last one had been watered he stood looking down at them silently.

"You're very thoughtful." She took the can from him.

He took another long breath and peeped up at her, slid his hands behind his back and clasped them tightly, then prodded at the tile path with the toe of his

boot. Amanda paused, sensing that he was nerving himself to speak.

At last, in a very small voice, he said, "Everyone will be watching, Imi."

A tight sensation in her chest and throat swelled and thickened. He had always been watched ever since he was a small, frail baby, the first Human/Vulcan hybrid to survive; the eyes had sometimes been friendly, always curious, occasionally hostile, but they had always been there.

She knelt down on the path in front of him and drew a box of seedlings close. "Dig one up for me," she said. "Just one - all by itself."

He flicked her a curious glance but obediently crouched to do as he was told.

"Put it down there on the path." She indicated a spot five or six inches away from the box. "Now, which particular plant can you see most easily?"

He smiled then, a slow, joyful smile, and she did not repress it. "The one all alone."

"Yes. Do you want to put it back in the box with the others?"

He tilted his head. "I'm not sure." He caught her look of surprise and said placatingly, "It is a very big and strong plant. It is quite old enough to grow by itself."

Delighted by his quick comprehension of her practical demonstration she said, "Plants do not have feelings as Humans do, but I can't help thinking it looks a little lonely all by itself. Perhaps it needs the other little plants for just a little while longer."

He looked at her very gravely. "Do you really think so, Imi?"

"Yes, I do." She was equally grave.

He gave a quick, impatient sigh. "Very well." He replanted it carefully and they slid the box back to its place.

She nodded approval, and then said conspiratorially, "I'm hungry - and thirsty. How about some brownies and hilva juice?"

Snacks between meals were very rare, very secret treats. "Mmmm" He nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, please."

She sent him back twice to finish removing the earth accumulated under his finger nails before finally handing him the tin of brownies and picking up the tray with the carafe and glasses.

"Where shall we have our picnic?"

"In the east corner, under the ssava vine." He called I-Chaya to join them and they settled down together in the shade. He leaned himself comfortably against the old animal and gave it a surreptitious brownie when he thought she wasn't looking.

After his second one he sighed contentedly. "Dancing isn't really so very bad," he said dreamily. "I expect I would have liked it when I was little."

"I expect so. It will be nice for me, though."

"How?" He was puzzled.

"I shall be able to see you."

His eyes gleamed. "But I shall be with all the others."

She shook her head. "Mothers can always see their children," she said positively.

She tried to explain the problem to Sarek that night, but was not really sure she'd made him understand. To divert his mind from Spock's shockingly unVulcan duplicity she turned to a mild form of attack.

"Why didn't you tell me our son was a budding genius?"

He stared at her. "There are no grounds for such a statement, Amanda."

She smiled. "Oh, but there are. At least, he's way ahead of his Vulcan contemporaries, though not so very advanced for a Human. But a lot better than average, I'd say."

"Is he ahead of his contemporaries?" He sounded as though he could not quite believe it.

"Quite a lot, yes. Sarek, when did you learn to read? At what age?"

"Six. Just before I began my formal schooling."

"And you didn't think anything of it when Spock learned even younger? And he's even further ahead in maths."

"It had not occurred to me. I presume he found the school environment insufficiently stimulating?"

She nodded. "T'Ulisa's going to keep a careful eye on things from now on. I don't think he'll be too reluctant to go now."

It was no easy matter to explain Spock's all-too-Human 'feelings' about dancing in public in a logical and unemotive way, but Amanda did the best she could.

T'Ulisa heard her out and said serenely, "I do not believe this is the moment to exert external discipline, do you? When he is older, perhaps not even until the time of the Kahs-wan, will be time enough for purely Vulcan ideals of behaviour. Do you consider him to be mature enough to make his own decision?"

"He does know that I think he should take part," Amanda told her, "but I know he would like to have some say in the matter himself."

"Very well. I will give him the choice."

Amanda got to her feet and made the formal gesture of farewell. "You have been very understanding, T'Ulisa. I am grateful."

"Each child is an individual." T'Ulisa's face lit with a half-smile. "It is stimulating to deal with one as challenging as Spock - a true representative of IDIC."

It was not until during the course of the evening meal that Spock made any reference to the forthcoming festival. Picking up his spoon and cutting into his portion of livakli he announced importantly, "T'Ulisa said I did not have to dance at Glah'kerfal if I did not wish to."

Amanda interrupted hurriedly and - by Vulcan standards - rudely, before Sarek could utter the quelling comment she could see him forming. "And what did you tell T'Ulisa?" She shot a warning glance at her husband, willing him to understand.

Spock swallowed his mouthful carefully before he replied. "Oh, I said I would." He took a quick, peeping look from one adult face to the other and added tolerantly, "Some of the children are very young."

"Your remark requires clarification, Spock," Sarek said drily.

Amanda looked down at her plate, hiding her amusement.

"It is helpful to have older ones to do the dances correctly," Spock explained. "I do not make mistakes, you see... and nor do Sotal and T'Jai." He sounded faintly surprised. "It is pleasant to be useful."

"Every Vulcan must strive to be so," Sarek agreed. He was well aware of Amanda's inner laughter, but he did not comprehend it, and diplomatically changed the subject.

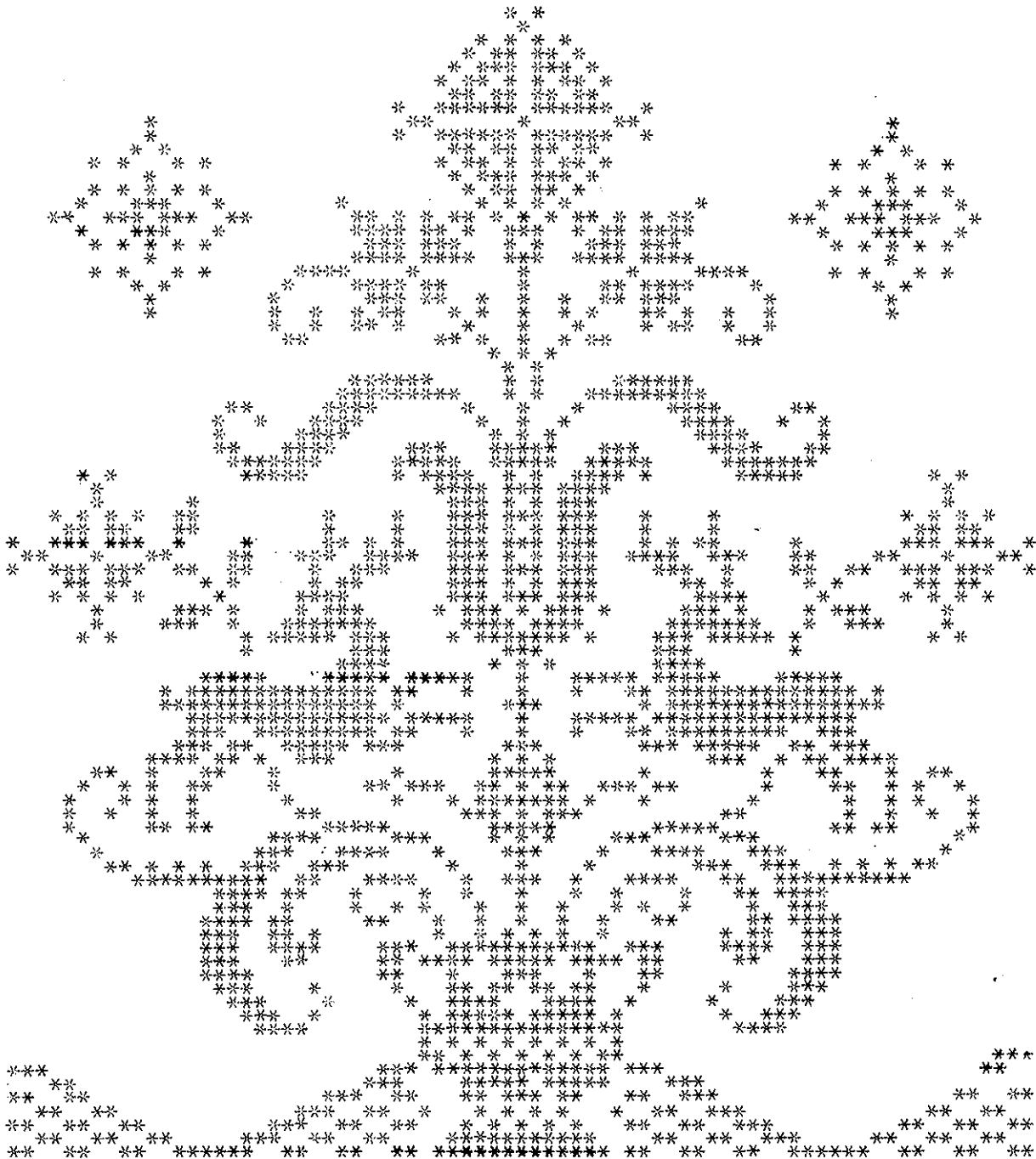
Later, in the privacy of their own room, he raised enquiring eyebrows at her. "Has the matter been resolved, my wife?"

"Indeed - to everyone's satisfaction."

He shook his head, allowing a tiny gleam of affection to lighten his face. "The ways of Humans are hard to comprehend," he said, "and I do not understand why it should amuse you that our son does not make mistakes in the dances."

"Oh," she pursed her mouth demurely, "it wasn't that. Just that I believe that he will perform them with perfect dignity and grace... We will be proud of our son on the day of Glah'kerfal, my husband."

And they were.



TIME OF NEEDINGSheryl Peterson

The need was always mine.
 Right from the very beginning, when I first came aboard, a
 green young Captain with a strange new Starship...

You were always there.

Not intruding. Not belittling me with your knowledge, or
 making me feel useless, considering your years aboard her, when you
 always knew what to do and I was unsure.

But there... at my side. Like some shield-bearer of old, sworn
 to serve, and asking nothing in return.

I grew to depend on you, and to love you as a friend.

But you never needed me.

Oh, I saved your life a couple of times (and how many dozens
 of times did you save me compared to it?)

I played chess with you, and now and then confounded you with
 my 'illogical' Human ways, so that sometimes I felt our friendship
 was a game to you... and I was a child you tolerated, and cared for,
 without saying why.

Perhaps you were lonely... I know I was.

But you never needed me.

Till now...

We face each other across your cabin, like some alien warriors
 fighting an age-old war that has no name; the trappings of your
 far-away Vulcan accenting your strangeness - making you more unreachable
 than ever before.

You turn aside my every question, retreating behind Vulcan
 reticence as you plainly state what troubles you is "a thing no Outworlder
 may know."

Not even me, Spock?

McCoy has told me you will die if you do not reach Vulcan...

Is Death more dear to you than I can be?

I have never seen you so implacable... so shuttered against
 me in all our time together.

Even at the first, it was not like this.

You were shielded by Vulcan reserve, but not so fiercely defensive;
 merely a walled citadel that was there as my path approached. But now
 you bristle with power on every side, defying me to enter your heart...
 to plumb the secret of whatever horror possesses you.

Your face is a mask of stone - yet behind your back, your hands
 tremble, clenched with a desperation that is purely Human. I want to
 put my arms around your shoulders - those rock-like shoulders that I
 thought could never bow - and hold you close, comforting you, the way
 my brother did to me, when I was an unhappy child, shattered by some
 childish disaster.

But I do not dare.

Yet I feel your need!

"Spock. Let me help." I beg silently with my whole heart, even
 while I say in bland words that if I'm to lose the finest First Officer
 in the Fleet, I want to know why.

But, of course, praise will not move you either.

Was there anything that ever could?

I turn to leave... defeated.

My heart aches that now, in your moment of need, you will not let me be the one to be needed in my turn.

Then I stop in mid-step...

Did I imagine it?
Or did you really speak, in a whisper so low it was little more than a sigh, and say...

"It has to do with biology..."

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HE I CHOOSE

He is mine
In a way no other was
or ever again can be.
He I choose -
And he alone shall walk
The pathways of my heart.
Only his eyes
Can look into the places
I hold secret.
I place myself
Here, by his side,
Death shall not tear us apart!
I am his
In a way that I will
Not allow to any other.
All my powers,
All my strengths, are but
The bow to fit his hand.

I shall be his hound,
His falcon, his liegeman,
His guard and brother.
If the universe
Were mine to give,
He'd receive it from my hands.
Others watch,
And do not understand
The truth of what they're seeing.
A Vulcan and a Human,
Friends? Impossible,
It would seem.
I guard him
And guide his footsteps.
He shows me how to be Human,
And with him
I am more content
Than I once dared to dream.

Sheryl Peterson

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And just in case you thought we'd lost the joke book...

McCoy: I suppose all geniuses are conceited.

Spock: Some are. I'm not.

Riley: I can trace my family back to royalty.

Sulu: King Kong?

Kirk: My nose is running, my throat's blocked, my sinuses need draining,
and my chest feels like lead. Can't you help me?

McCoy: I'm a doctor, not a plumber.

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* * * * *

ALL THAT GLISTERS

by

Therese Holmes

I don't know for certain that it was my idea, but it could well have been one of those lapses that can happen to anyone, really. Though I suppose it must have seemed like a good idea at the time. The crew need these little diversions, particularly when R&R has just been put off yet again. Bones says it keeps their minds supple. All I know is that I was feeling bored; and when a Captain's bored, it's a fair bet that the rest of the crew are finding time hanging heavy on their hands too. I seemed to be spending a lot of time in Sickbay - drinking coffee.

"I'll have to put you in nurse's uniform soon," grumbled McCoy. But, actually, he seemed to welcome the company. I've never seen such a row of empty beds.

Sometimes we drank other things besides coffee, and one morning, meeting me on my way to the Bridge, he mentioned that he'd been thinking about what I'd said the previous evening.

"What did I say?" I asked suspiciously.

"You know. Your idea." He grinned and nudged me with his elbow.

I couldn't remember having had any idea the night before, and still can't, but Bones says I did, and I see no reason to doubt him.

"Exploitation of the competitive instinct is a very effective way of exercising the mind in low-stimulation situations," he said.

(We were on our way to Starbase 10 to pick up a cargo shipment required by a planet in our sector - a low-stimulation situation if ever there was one.)

"You sound like Spock," I said, stepping into the turbolift.

"I got it out of a textbook."

"So you think we should organise a competition to keep the crew occupied?"

"Well, it was your idea."

"Yes, of course. I get so many, you know; I lose track. You have a suggestion, then?"

"Well, I think we ought to keep it fairly frivolous. Does no harm for the crew to let their hair down once in a while."

"Yodelling - knobbly knees - that sort of thing?" I ventured.

"Hmm. Too specialised. We want something everyone can take part in."

"Are you saying you can't yodel?"

"Are you saying you've got knobbly knees?"

"That's beside the point. This is for the crew's benefit, remember? 'A Captain's work is never done, A Captain's life is full of fun.' I don't need these distractions."

"Sure. It's just that my coffee dispenser could use a rest."

I declined to reply.

For the next two days I amused myself by searching for a suitable theme for our competition. Bones turned down all my suggestions, while he himself could only come up with dumb things like a Headstand Marathon. Finally, I went to Spock, to see if he could help me. I found him in his quarters, playing a catchy little tune on his lyre, so I sat down and listened.

"That's nice," I said, when he'd finished. "Very hummable. What is it?"

"It is a traditional melody, Captain; the basis for innumerable Vulcan songs."

I tried to imagine innumerable Vulcans singing.

"In one version, it is the subject of an annual contest in which the entrants are required to compose verses to fit the tune. The winner is that one showing the most skill, both in this, and in presentation."

Something clicked.

"That's it!" I cried. "There's our competition!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I've been looking for something like this. I knew you'd have the answer!" I filled him in on the details, and he seemed to approve.

"You are proposing that the entrants compose English lyrics to the tune, and perform it in front of the crew?"

"Exactly. I know it's not ideal - not everyone will want to take part. But it's something. And it's better than anything Bones has thought of."

"Might I suggest that we give two prizes, one for the words, and one for the performance? That should ensure a wider participation. And I also advise a limit of three verses - or perhaps four - to deter the saga-writers. You probably noticed that the tune falls quite naturally into a verse/chorus structure, continually repeated?"

"Oh - certainly. Yes."

"It is a form much favoured on Vulcan, and has proved ideal for this purpose over thousands of years. Indeed, the only problem I can foresee is in the matter of prizes. On Vulcan it is customary to give a lyre. I received my own in this way." He strummed it modestly.

"No, really? Why, Spock, you must sing me your prize-winning entry... sometime. As for the prizes, you know very well that in Starfleet it's customary to give a bottle of Saurian Brandy."

He looked pained. "I hardly think it suitable..."

"Well, I'll see what I can think of. We might be able to dig something up out of Stores. Meanwhile, since you're entering so well into the spirit of this thing, I'm appointing you Competition Co-ordinator. I'm sure you'll be able to handle it along with your administrative and executive duties?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Fine."

And I went off to tell Bones he could stop making plans for the Great USS Enterprise Doily Cutting Competition, or whatever his latest harebrained notion was.

A few days later we arrived at Stabase 10, where we were to pick up our cargo consignment. The Commanding Officer was an old friend of mine, so I popped down for a chat. In the middle of our conversation it occurred to me to ask what our cargo was actually to be.

"Gold."

"Gold what?"

"Just gold. Bars, if you like. Or bricks. Just gold."

"Just... gold."

"Bullion, then. Whatever you like to call it."

There was a pause, and then we both spoke at once.

"We'll never get off the ground..."

"I know it's a heavy responsibility..."

We both smiled politely, and there was a further pause.

"But, Lech," I said, "who the hell wants - or needs - a Starshipful. of gold? And why can't a regular cargo ship take it?"

"Oidar Three is who wants it, Jim. Gold doesn't occur naturally on that planet, and apparently the natives have taken such a liking to what they've seen of it on other worlds that they want their own supply. And as for why you... well, they've been prevaricating over whether or not to join the Federation for some time now, and we hope this special honour might help to make up their minds in our favour."

"Why do we want them?"

"Why not? The more the merrier. And they've also done some spectacular work in metal chemistry, which it seems we would very much like to participate in. But let's leave the whys and wherefores to the politicians. How's the old tub?"

"The... Pardon?"

"The Enterprise. You haven't forgotten her already?"

The old tub! It was lucky for him that he was an old friend.

"Oh - she's still holding together."

"And the crew?"

"The same. We're organising a little competition to take their minds off missing R&R on account of some poxy planet's gold-lust. Or at least, Spock is."

"Your First Officer?"

"Right."

"What sort of competition does a Vulcan organise? To find the crewman who keeps the straightest face during the ship's concert?"

"Hey, that's worth bearing in mind, considering what we are doing." I told him about it.

"Spock thought of that?"

"Well, some of it. And I thought of some of it. Or so I'm told. The trouble is, we don't know what to give for prizes."

"How about a bottle of Saurian Brandy? That's the usual thing."

"I know, but Spock's digging in his heels. He says it would lower the dignity of the occasion. As far as I'm concerned, the lower the better, but I did promise him I'd try and come up with something more fitting. Stores don't seem to have anything suitable, though."

"Hmm," he mused.

"Well, I suppose I'd better be getting back to the old tub..."

"Wait a minute, Jim. I've got an idea. I'm sure I could get authority for you to requisition a small amount of your cargo - say a few grams. Your labs could knock up some sort of an award out of it, surely?"

"Lech! A gold medal, something like that? That would be really great! Really big league stuff!"

"Yeah, well, only a few grams, mind."

"Sure. We can trick it out with something. And Spock will just have to put up with Brandy as the other prize. You'll be able to clear it, all right?"

Oh, this is great! I must go and tell him. See you, Lech."

Spock received my news with restrained delight, which not even the prospect of Saurian Brandy could dispel, and went straight off to the lab to supervise the preparations for casting the gold. Later that night, over a game of chess, I told him how it was that we came to be carrying a hold full of it anyway. Of course, he knew all about the Oidarites and their precious metal chemistry.

"Much of their work is currently secret, and it would indeed be fortunate if they could be persuaded to join the Federation and open their files to us."

I sighed. "Doesn't anybody ever join us just because they like us?"

"Jim, if mutual affection had been made an entrance requirement, the UFP would never have got off the ground, so to speak."

That reminded me. "Oh, I must tell you. Lech and I both made a joke today, only we both spoke at once, which kind of spoiled it. When he told me we were going to be carrying all this gold, I said, 'We'll never get off the ground', and he said..."

"I know it's a heavy responsibility for you."

"How did you know?"

"I've become something of an expert on Human wit. Check."

The journey to Oidar Three was to take twenty-four days. We decided to hold the contest while in orbit around the planet, which gave Spock just over three weeks to arrange it all, distribute tapes of the tune, copies of the score and the rules, and so on. In addition, he had to oversee the design and making of the award, which we decided would be in the form of a miniature Vulcan lyre, protected by a crystal casing. This was to go to the best performer, while the best lyricist would receive the Saurian Brandy - but as I told Spock consolingly, it was a very rare vintage, donated by Scotty from his personal collection.

I hadn't intended to enter the thing myself - it was, after all, meant as a diversion for the crew. 'A Captain's work is never done', and all that. But I found the damned tune running round in my head, and one afternoon, two days from Oidar Three and bored with mounds of paper-work, I began to scribble down some words that had occurred to me. It must have been about two hours later, as I was putting in the last full stop, that the intercom buzzed.

"Kirk here."

"Spock, Captain. Would you come down to the metallurgy lab, sir?"

"Problem?"

"Possibly."

"On my way."

It took me some time, as once I'd set out I realised I wasn't quite sure exactly where the metallurgy lab was; it isn't something I need to visit all that often, and some of the remoter parts of the Science Section had been extensively altered during our last refit. But eventually I found it, tucked away behind Hydroponics, and there was Spock, and a technician with a worried face.

"Well, Spock, what is it?" I said briskly.

"Captain, Mr. Patel has made a rather disturbing discovery."

I turned to the technician, who now looked worrieder than ever. "Rising damp in the furnaces?"

He smiled wanly. "No, sir. Worse than that. It's this gold."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Well, sir... it isn't gold."

"Not...? Explain."

"I tested it, sir. Not just what we were given for the award, but some of the main consignment too. It's fake. Some sort of alloy, though of what, I haven't been able to figure out yet. But it's definitely not gold. The Patel Test is infallible."

"Patel Test? Spock?"

"Gold is Mr. Patel's speciality, sir. He has recently perfected a non-destructive identification and assay technique which should come into routine use once the paper he is preparing on the subject is published."

He was obviously proud of the prodigy he had nurtured in the depths of his Department.

"I have every confidence in him, Captain. He has demonstrated the test to me, and shown me his results, obtained both with genuine gold, and with this substance. I agree with his conclusion."

The implications of what they were saying swam before my eyes. "But Spock! The Oidarites..."

"Precisely."

"If they don't get their gold, they'll probably decide once and for all not to join the Federation. Our name will be mud - and I don't mean Harry!"

"Exactly."

I thought rapidly. "The only thing we can do is to bluff it out for now - pretend that as far as we know it is the real thing - sorry, Mr. Patel, but there it is. Hopefully, the Oidarites will join in a fit of goodwill, and afterwards we can break it to them... Oh but Spock, didn't you say they were the last word in metal chemistry? Won't they be likely to detect the fake for themselves?"

"You forget, Captain, that the sole reason we are carrying this consignment is because gold does not occur naturally on Oidar Three. They are unlikely to have devoted a great deal of study to it, or to have developed their own Patel Test."

It occurred to me that we ought not to be discussing this in front of Mr. Patel, so I asked Spock to come back to my quarters. When we got there my yeoman was about, tidying up, so we went through to Spock's.

"As I see it," I said, sitting down, "I have only two choices. I can call this whole thing off, and let everybody know there's some funny business going on, offend the Oidarites now and probably lose them for the Federation. Or, as I said, bluff it out, wait till they join, then blow the gaffe, and hope they won't take it so badly that they leave us. When is Patel's paper coming out?"

"Well, he had yet to complete it. Then it will have to be transmitted to a scientific journal to await publication... I should say several months, perhaps even a year."

"Hmm... Long enough, do you think?"

He paused. "Captain, are you suggesting that Mr. Patel should suppress his discovery until the Oidarites are safely within the Federation?"

Put like that, it made me wish that Spock hadn't put it like that.

"Jim, if it should become known, and the Oidarites discover not only that their 'gold' is a worthless alloy, but that you knew about it all along - well, consider the diplomatic consequences of that."

I frowned at the firepot. "I know, I know. Everything in me says make a

clean breast of it now, and get an investigation going. But this isn't going to reflect well on Starfleet, Spock. I mean, how the hell did it happen? There must have been a massive security cock-up somewhere. What's happened to the real gold? Has it been stolen?"

"All the more reason, surely, for setting up an investigation immediately. If we wait a year or more, we may never discover the truth."

"Yes, yes, I can see all that. It's a risk either way. But I have to choose the lesser of two evils." I stood up and began to pace. "I just... I'll have to think about it."

Yeoman Buonaperte had gone when I got back to my quarters. My desk was now covered with neatly-arranged piles of paper, and as I couldn't face sorting through them to find the ones I'd been working on, I lay down on the bed to think. When I woke, my mind was made up. Clearly, we had to make sure of the Oidarites first. No-one except myself, Spock and Patel would know about the fake until it could be safely disclosed; or someone else discovered it using Patel's technique. Spock would disapprove, but that was too bad.

Meanwhile, the miniature lyre would be cast and encased in crystal. I hoped whoever won it wasn't too friendly with Mr. Patel.

Two days later, we entered orbit around Oidar Three. Spock, Bones and myself beamed down just as the competition was starting in Rec Room Three. I was sorry to miss it, but one has to go through with these formal greetings.

We materialised in front of a large stone building, dazzlingly white in the sun. A single Oidarite was there to meet us. He stepped forward, smiling.

"What's your handle?" he said. "I'm Shifter."

I looked hard at Spock, trying to convey the idea that I strongly felt he should have warned me to bring a Universal Translator. But then, he'd been damned unco-operative since I'd told him my decision to cover up about the fake gold.

"I... er..."

Spock spoke. "Call me Spock. This here's the Doc. And this is our Captain, Kirk."

"Ten four."

These strange preliminaries over, we proceeded into the white building. Shifter informed us we were being taken to meet Ace, the leader of the Oidarites. At least, I assumed that's what he said.

Ace was a short, emphatic man with the reddest hair I've ever seen. His conversation was largely unintelligible to me, and he addressed most of it to Spock, who didn't deign to translate. Bones nodded sagely now and then, but I was willing to bet he understood no more of what was being said than I did.

I fumed quietly, rehearsing all the things I would say to Spock as soon as we were alone together. I was just honing the edge of a really cutting remark when I noticed that Ace had stopped talking; and they were all looking at me. I signalled Spock to help me out, but he was implacable.

"That rather alters things, does it not, Captain?" he said.

"Oh... quite."

"My congratulations to you, Mr. Ace, on the success of your enterprise. now we must return to ours to see to the beaming down of the cargo."

"Why, Ace," said Bones, "you're mighty privileged. It's not everyone who gets to hear Spock crack a joke after such a slight acquaintance."

I rose. "Come on, Bones. Spock, thank Ace, and..."

"The man in white stays," said Ace.

"I beg your pardon?"

"He means me, Jim," said Bones. "I'm a doctor."

"I know you're a doctor, dammit!" I could feel myself getting peevish. "I ought to by now. You tell us often enough. I suppose he wants you to cure somebody for him?"

"His son. I think."

"Okay, stay if you want. C'mon, Spock."

We beamed up in silence, and neither of us spoke a word until we were in the corridor outside the transporter room.

"Captain," said Spock, "I believe the competition is still in progress, if you would like to..."

"I'll tell you what I would like, Spock. I would like a full report on our visit to Oidar Three."

"A report...?"

"You know damn well I couldn't understand a word." We strolled slowly along the corridor towards the Rec Room. "I know you're sore at me for pulling the wool over their eyes, but your behaviour this afternoon came pretty close to insubordination, Mister."

"I ask forgiveness..."

"Apologies can come later. For now just tell me what you and Ace were talking about."

"I was about to ask forgiveness for not realising that you were having difficulty following the speech, as I see now must have been the case. You did not hear what Mr. Ace said concerning the gold?"

"Gold? No. They haven't tumbled to it already?"

"No; except in the sense that they knew about it all along."

"What?"

"As I understand it, their scientists have developed an alloy which they believe to be indistinguishable from gold. But Oidar Three lacks the facilities to produce it in the quantities which would be necessary to satisfy their requirements, so in great secrecy they contacted the Federation, revealed the details of their process, and requested that a pilot batch be produced using a scaled-up version of it. That pilot batch is now in our hold, and in the process of being beamed down to the planet. Both sides naturally agreed on complete secrecy for the time being, and Mr. Ace seemed most pleased at the success of the subterfuge."

I was speechless. "It's... It's... And Starfleet knew?!"

"I would imagine certain officers were informed."

"I bet Lech knew! Why the... Just wait till I see him again. I'll give him a heavy responsibility! But why wasn't I told? Why this elaborate game? Why me?"

"I doubt that they picked on you particularly, Jim..."

"Wanna bet?"

"... but apparently Ace specifically requested that a Starship transport the alloy to Oidar Three, wishing, I presume, to give proper weight to the occasion."

"Now don't you start! I've had enough. And if anyone so much as mentions my 'gilt complex'... But what's the point of inventing something like this? It's only effect is to make real gold practically worthless."

"Indeed. The Oidarites seem quite obsessed with the subject. I believe it is Ace's philanthropic intention to bring unlimited quantities of gold within the reach of everybody - especially Oidarites."

"But if it's worthless..."

"The intrinsic value seems to be of no consequence to them. They covet the metal merely for its aesthetic qualities."

"They like the look of it, you mean. And the Federation would just let them get on with it?"

"It would appear that they want the Oidarites as much as the Oidarites want gold."

I muttered pretty fiercely for a while. "Well, I hope Ace is satisfied," I said at last.

"I believe he is, from what he was saying this afternoon."

"You mean...?"

"Precisely."

I waited.

"Well, what do you mean?"

An eyebrow twitched.

"Your pardon. Ace intimated that he will shortly be opening negotiations with the Federation with a view to applying for membership."

"Oh, he intimated that, did he? Well, he's in for a nasty shock, isn't he?"

"Shock?"

"When he hears about the Patel Test."

Just then we arrived at the Rec Room. It was pretty crowded, but nothing much seemed to be going on as we slipped in at the back.

"Hello, Captain, Mr. Spock," said a voice. "You're back just in time to hear the results."

"Hi, Uhura. Did we miss much?"

"Plenty." She looked a little nervous.

"I trust your own entry found favour, Miss Uhura?" said Spock.

"They seemed to like it."

They stood chatting for a few minutes while I stood pondering my new dilemma. Should I tell Ace about the Patel Test? Should I wait until Oidar Three had joined the Federation? Should I just let it ride, and let things take their course?

Suddenly there was a movement up front. Uhura looked expectant. "Here it comes," she said.

An ensign from the medical section clambered onto the stage, and cleared his throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen... er... this has been a most difficult decision. My fellow judges and I wish to express our surprise that such a rich vein of talent, hitherto untapped, should have lain dormant in the bowels - or rather, in the hearts, or wherever - of the crew of the Enterprise. However, that said, and after much wrangling, we have finally reached a unanimous decision, which is that both prizes should go to Lt. Uhura."

The room erupted in thunderous applause. Uhura gave a little gasp, and began to push her way towards the stage. Spock looked inordinately pleased.

"Spock," I said, edging up to him, "you can stay and listen to her piece, then I want to see you in my quarters. We have to decide what to do about the Patel Test."

"The what, Captain? I beg your pardon, sir, Miss Uhura is about to sing."

The room fell silent as Uhura seated herself, and began to strum a Vulcan lyre - Spock's lyre. Her voice was pure and liquid, and the words she sang edged the melody with sadness.

"My name is what I say it is,
I am the thing I seem.
In death's dark vale I lay me down
To sleep, perchance to dream..."

I listened, entranced, until the end, when further applause brought me back to myself. Beside me, Spock was clapping harder than anyone.

"Do you approve, Mr. Spock?"

"A most accurate and telling translation from the original Vulcan, Captain, taken from one of the earliest versions. Miss Uhura is to be congratulated."

"I see you lent her your lyre for the occasion."

"She consulted me about some obscure wording. I was pleased to offer what help I could."

"Naturally."

I would have said more, but my attention was caught by what Uhura was saying from the stage.

"... a little birdie having just told me that this rare artifact," she held up the tiny lyre in its crystal casing, "is actually worth rather less than this bottle of Saurian Brandy, I would like to take the liberty of passing it on to one who richly deserves it. I am pleased to announce that the 'No Respector of Vulcan Traditions' prize goes to Yeoman 'Alleycat' Buonaperte. Step forward, Alley!"

My yeoman! From the reception she was getting, I gathered that Uhura's verdict was generally approved of. But... 'Alleycat'? 'No Respector of Vulcan Traditions'? You can never tell, I thought. In fact, I was just musing on the subject of lights hidden under bushels, when she launched into that same 'disrespectful' performance. The hair rose on the back of my neck as I recognised the words, of which I now dare remember only the first verse and the chorus:

"The Yeoman gaped at what she saw
Around the Captain's quarters.
Across the bed, the walls, the floor
Were ten Orion's daughters.

CHORUS: Ten green slavegirls hanging round for Jim,
Ten green slavegirls hanging round for Jim;
And if one green slavegirl should get on top of him,
There'd be ten green slavegirls
And not a lot of Jim..."

The wretched girl must have found those scribbled notes on my desk, and decided to enter with them - without even consulting me! The dreadful thing crashed on. Could this really be the same haunting melody that Uhura had sung so movingly? Though I had to admit she was putting it over rather well. In fact, after a couple of verses I had to stop myself joining in, and at the end I roared and stamped with the rest of them, despite Spock's disapproving look.

Well, I thought, at least he doesn't know who wrote it.

Then Yeoman Buonaperte began to give a speech. "I really can't take credit for another man's work," she said, "so I have to admit to you all that I am

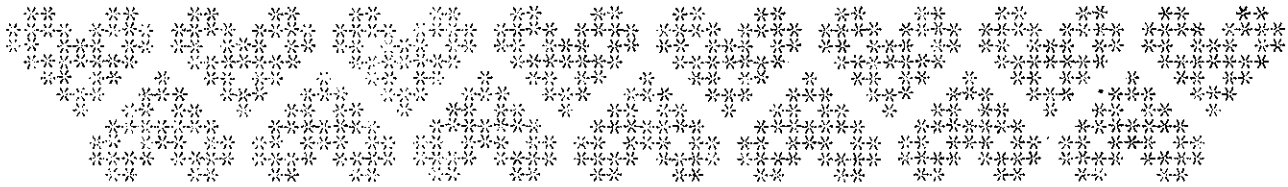
not the true author of those colourful lyrics. Than honour belongs to one who, sadly, cannot be with us today. One whom we all respect and admire, and to whom I shall pass on this ornamental and highly gratifying award. Ladies and gentlemen, please show your appreciation of Captain James T. Kirk!"

As I tried to sink into the floor beneath the weight of such appreciation, I noticed Uhura step up and say something in the Yeoman's ear. She went very red and left the stage in a hurry, and didn't come to tidy my quarters for two days. I turned to effect an escape also, and met the frigid glare of Spock.

Whoops, I thought, let's hope he realises my heart will stand up under any Patel Test ever invented.

I shrugged lamely, and left.

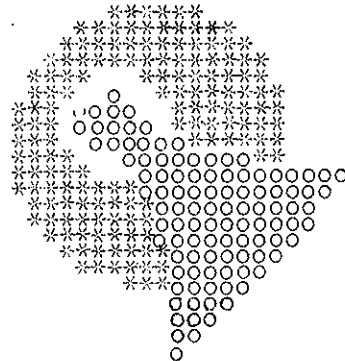
So here I am. We leave Oidar Three tomorrow, and I still haven't told Ace about the Patel Test. Seems to me whatever I do, I'll be in the soup. And Spock hasn't spoken to me since the competition. I stare at the tiny golden lyre set in crystal which stands on my desk, and wonder whoever said a Captain's life is full of fun.



THE ANSWER

The dream of long searched for serenity
 Was almost mine,
 Until kindled again fear stood stark in my mind,
 Waiting, where it had lain to rest, to rise once more
 At the peril I senses for Earth and the ties I had thought forgotten.
 Our affinity of minds, yours and mine,
 Stronger than the cleansing floods of logic,
 Transcending all levels of discipline,
 Sending me back to stand again at your side,
 As turn and turn again,
 Emotions fluttered to life.
 Within the touch of our hands,
 The flow of emotion from one to another
 Beyond all words.
 Worthy of more than my shame, so nearly lost,
 What we have shared no barren, emptied heart could comprehend.
 My Human half,
 More than the weakening of my Vulcan blood,
 Capable of completing my life
 In a way that logic alone could never do.
 In accepting its presence
 I begin to accept myself as I am.

Gillian Catchpole



MY T'HY'LAAnn Smith

My T'hy'la

What is this tie that binds us
One to the other?

Through all eternity...

I have kept a close watch on my heart.
Hidden in shame the feelings I experienced.
Behind a mask of coldness,
I have viewed the universe,
Found emotion distasteful...

then why... oh why...

Do I 'feel' for you?
Not only feel, but long to show you I do...
Why do my defences fall
Before those laughing hazel eyes?
(I become only the sum of what I am, half Vulcan,
Half Human, with all that it entails.)

I have looked deep within myself,
The answer eludes me.
It is NOT LOGICAL.
All the years I strove to conquer my Human half,
To become a true Vulcan,
Yet... in the space of a smile,
You stripped me of those years...
Bared my soul... my being trembled...
And I was lost.

I glimpsed Paradise,
Yet dared not reach out... uncertain.
Could you understand
My need for you?
(I do not understand myself,)
Why you, a Human, of all people,
Should reach me...
And I... I against myself... because of myself...
Surrender... gladly.

I will tread gently in our friendship,
Sensing your hurt and loneliness,
(As I know you see mine.)
I will be patient,
We will learn... together...
And there will come a time... a meeting...
Of our minds... all that we are...
Completeness... touching - touched... with love.

My T'hy'la

I await that day with trembling heart.

Together... fulfilment.

YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND

by

Ann Preece

The Captain of the Enterprise hurried along the corridor towards the transporter room: he had promised to meet his First Officer there in ten minutes and he didn't want to be late. Even now, he couldn't quite believe that Spock actually had agreed to his tentative request to accompany him on this shore leave, knowing the Vulcan's usual preference for staying aboard and refusing R & R of any kind. Kirk remembered - very clearly - the evening in his quarters when he had first broached the subject; remembered his surprise - swiftly turning to unconcealed delight - when Spock had accepted, without hesitation, his offer to join him on a camping expedition to Kynuzia.

Having only been in command of the Enterprise for little over nine months, Kirk felt a momentary twinge of guilt - quickly dispelled - at looking forward so eagerly to a few days away from his ship, but they had all certainly earned it, he mused. Their last mission had been extremely difficult, to say the least, and as if that wasn't enough, a series of particularly nasty skirmishes with the Klingons hadn't helped matters either. The Enterprise had eventually proved the victor, sending the enemy limping off home to 'lick his wounds', so to speak, but not before the battle had taken its toll both on the ship and the over-worked crew. As a direct result of this, Kirk received a communique from Commodore Mortimer at Starbase 20, ordering shore leave for all non-essential personnel (even Scotty had been persuaded to leave his 'bairns'!) while the Enterprise underwent necessary repairs.

Although there had been other opportunities for leave spent planet-side, this was the first time Kirk had been successful in persuading his Vulcan First Officer to accompany him; the Captain had normally taken his leave periods alone, or had accompanied McCoy, the doctor having become a close friend; while Spock, with his usual Vulcan reticence, preferred to remain aboard the Enterprise.

Until now...

If anyone had asked Kirk, at that precise moment, why he considered this shore leave to be so important to him, he didn't think he could formulate a suitable answer. All he knew for certain was that he would have an opportunity to get to know the Vulcan as a person, not just as an officer. From the very start of the mission, when Kirk had assumed command of the Enterprise and met his First Officer for the first time, he had sensed that there was more to the Vulcan than was outwardly apparent, and perhaps now he would have a chance to penetrate through Spock's outer shell and discover the inner man he felt was kept so carefully hidden from the outside world...

"Jim!"

Kirk halted in mid-stride as the sound of his Chief Medical Officer's somewhat commandatorial tone of voice broke in on his reverie. A momentary thought crossed his mind and inwardly he groaned. // Oh no - not again!// Squaring his shoulders, and bracing himself for the verbal onslaught he knew was to follow, he turned slowly to face McCoy, and expression of resignation on his handsome features.

"What is it this time, Bones?" he asked, allowing a note of exasperation to creep into the usually light tone. It was the tone of voice that should have warned McCoy to tread warily, but he either didn't notice, or he chose to ignore the warning, plunging straight in as was his usual custom.

"So you're really going through with this, then?"

"Through with what?" Kirk parried, knowing full well to what the doctor was referring.

"All this nonsense about asking Spock - of all people - to accompany you on shore leave. You can't be serious!"

Kirk sighed. He had lost count of the number of times he had had a similar such argument with McCoy, and it always ended in the same way, with either one, or both, becoming heated. Kirk was beginning to feel just a little tired of the whole affair.

"Doctor - we've been over this argument time and time again. Haven't I got through to you yet?"

"But Spock... and you... on shore leave - together..."

"So? I don't see anything particularly odd in that. We enjoy each other's company, we find we have much in common, and after all, he is my First Officer."

"Precisely! And this is supposed to be a shore leave, not a duty assignment! Just think of all the fun you'll be missing..."

"I thought this was supposed to be a rest cure?" Kirk interrupted.

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Jim. I just want what's best for you, that's all, and somehow I don't think that ten days alone with that... logical computer... is going to be very pleasant for you. Now - if you'd just consider joining Scotty and myself, well..." Too late, he saw the flash of anger in the hazel eyes.

"Bones - will you please stop trying to manage my life for me. There's nothing sinister about all this. I asked Spock to accompany me - he graciously accepted. Can't you leave it at that?"

"And that's your final word on the subject?"

"YES!"

"Okay, okay - keep your shirt on! I only wanted to help..."

Kirk's gaze softened as he noticed McCoy's obvious discomfort. "I know, Bones - and I'm sorry. I had no right to fly off the handle like that." Kirk fell silent for a moment, obviously considering his next words with care. "It's been nine months since I took command of the Enterprise, and this is the first chance I've had to persuade Spock to join me on shore leave - until now he has always refused. But we both need a few days away from the ship, away from the pressures, and all the decisions and responsibilities that seem to go with the job. And I'll have a chance to get to know my First Officer as a person, not just as my second-in-command."

"And that's important to you?" McCoy asked softly.

"Yes, Bones - very important. It's difficult to explain, but somehow I feel that beneath Spock's cool exterior, there's a very... lonely man just waiting to be found - and believe me, loneliness is something I know all about," Kirk reflected, somewhat pensively.

"Well, I wish you luck - I've a feeling you might need it."

The Captain smiled. "Don't worry about us, Bones - we'll be fine."

"You seem confident enough, but..." McCoy was not entirely convinced.

"He's coming with me, isn't he?"

"Yeah - I guess he is. But I hope you know what you're doing. Personally, I can't understand what you see in him..." McCoy commented as he turned away, retracing his steps towards Sickbay.

"Can't you, Bones?" Kirk replied, very quietly, before resuming his interrupted journey to the transporter room.

* * *

On Deck Five, Spock left the peace of his cabin, and with his usual calm and measured step, made his way to the turbolift which would take him to the

transporter room - and his forthcoming shore leave with Kirk.

No-one had been more surprised than Spock himself when he had accepted - without a second thought - Kirk's invitation to join him on Kynuzia, and several hours spent in meditation had failed to quell the very un-Vulcan feelings of eagerness he was experiencing as the time to transport down to Starbase 20 rapidly approached.

Kirk had been in command of the Enterprise for a mere nine months and already Spock had found his well-ordered existence, the familiar pattern of his life, disrupted by this enigmatic personality who had succeeded Captain Pike. From their very first meeting, Spock had sensed in Kirk a kindred spirit, someone to whom he could relate, and in a very short time the relationship between the two officers underwent a subtle change: the first tentative steps on the path towards friendship were taken, both parties giving and receiving the companionship which came easily to them, a companionship which - Spock hoped - would bring an end to his years of loneliness, a loneliness with which he believed Kirk was also familiar.

Making his way to the transporter room, Spock's normally calm thoughts were in a turmoil: he was a Vulcan, outwardly controlled and reserved, a private person, usually reticent, and supposedly self-sufficient, not given to requiring - or needing - the support of another - and, what was more, another of a differing race and cultural background. Yet, more and more, he found himself being irresistably drawn towards this Human whose very presence seemed to have a profound effect on him. Kirk was a man born to be a leader, and over the preceding months Spock had found it easier than he had expected to transfer his respect and loyalty to this new, young Captain. And out of those feelings of loyalty, Spock had come to recognise the blossoming of a new-found friendship which could, with careful nurturing, develop into something infinitely rare and precious, a relationship which could grow in strength over the years to come.

During the past weeks, they had found themselves drawn closer together by a common bond: loneliness. Spock could understand, and appreciate, that the life of a Starship Captain was, essentially, a lonely one, that friendships outside duty hours had, of necessity, to be confined among the higher ranking officers. It was a situation with which Spock, as a Vulcan, and therefore an outsider, was already familiar, having experienced many years spent in self-imposed loneliness, carefully avoiding contact with anyone capable of breaching the wall he had constructed around himself.

Until Kirk came along, and the Vulcan walls of loneliness had begun to crumble, very, very slowly.

The forthcoming R & R on Kynuzia would provide Spock with ample opportunity to 'get to know' as he believed, the correct Earth terminology, his commanding officer a little better. It was an experience which should prove interesting, and with that thought on his mind, Spock left the turbolift, arriving at the door of the transporter room at the same time as Kirk.

The Captain smiled at his First Officer. "Are you early, or am I late?" he asked, a teasing note in his voice.

He was rewarded by the now-familiar quirk of Spock's eyebrows, and an answering twinkle in the depths of the brown eyes.

"Neither, Captain - we are both on time."

They entered the transporter room together, and took up their customary positions on the pads.

"Looking forward to your shore leave, Mr. Kyle?"

"You bet, sir," was the exuberent reply from the transporter chief. "There's only a few more groups to beam down, and once the relief crew arrives, it'll be my turn." Kyle could barely control his excitement at the prospect of ten days off duty.

"I know exactly how you feel," Kirk replied, grinning. Then, as he was about to give the order to energise, two more figures hurried into the room.

"Hey - wait for us!" McCoy called as he took his place at Kirk's side, Scotty close on his heels.

"Bones!" There was a dangerous edge to Kirk's voice.

"It's okay, Jim - we're only beaming down with you, that's all." McCoy glanced at the impassive figure on Kirk's right before murmuring quietly, "I know when to give up." He caught Kirk's eye, and grinned.

Relieved, the Captain glanced across at Kyle. "See you in ten days, Mr. Kyle. Energise."

The four figures disappeared in a golden shimmer.

* * *

The next few hours, from their arrival on Starbase 20 to their leaving the passenger shuttle on Kynuzia, passed rapidly.

As the sparkle of the transporter effect died away, the four men found themselves caught up in the hustle and bustle which heralded their arrival at the base.

Having taken their leave of McCoy and Scotty - after promising to rendezvous with them at the same place prior to rejoining the Enterprise - Kirk and Spock made their way towards the spaceport, where a shuttle was waiting to take them on the final stage of their journey.

As Kirk attended to the organising of their equipment, and arranged their flight tickets, Spock appeared more than content to stand back and survey their temporary surroundings, his innate curiosity aroused by the variety of sights and sounds created by numerous representatives from all over the galaxy, as humanoid races mingled with other, more alien, life forms. The contrast between this scene of hyper-activity and the comparative calm and peacefulness of the Enterprise, which they had just left, was more than a little overwhelming, and Spock experienced a fleeting, almost unaccustomed, feeling of panic, momentarily wishing that he was away from this madness and safe within the confines of his own cabin aboard the Enterprise.

Giving himself a mental shake - such feelings were illogical - he pulled himself together. After all, he was here because he wanted to be, here by choice - his choice - and no-one had forced him to come. He had willingly accepted Kirk's offer to accompany him on this trip, knowing that the offer was made out of a feeling of genuine friendship. It was a shore leave which, Spock reflected, could prove important to them both, and he had no intention of letting this Human down, disappointing him in any way. He glanced up as Kirk hurried towards him, his face flushed, panting slightly as he manoeuvred his way through the milling crowd, and obviously enjoying every minute of it.

"Busy, isn't it?" he remarked, grinning at his companion. "Come on - let's get out of here. The shuttle leaves in fifteen minutes, and everything is arranged. Kynuzia will seem like Heaven compared with this place..."

And Kirk had been right. A little under two hours later they, and a handful of other passengers who had embarked on the same journey, arrived on Kynuzia, and immediately entered a different world.

Kynuzia was, for the most part, completely wild and untamed, overflowing with natural beauty, with a rugged charm all of its own, and was virtually as unspoiled and unchanged now as it had been on its discovery many years ago, providing a popular retreat for weary travellers wishing to escape from the hurly-burly of the outside world, even if only for a short while.

The inhabitants of Kynuzia - comprising mainly several nomadic tribes from different areas of the planet, were left very much to themselves, no interference being made with the natural process of development. Several large settlements or towns did exist, but these were few and far between, and on the

whole were very primitive, closely resembling the Middle Ages period of Earth's history. Kynuzia was just the place for two Starfleet officers who wanted to forget their responsibilities for a few days, to enjoy each other's company without the pressures of life or death decisions.

After leaving the shuttle terminal the Captain and First Officer struck out in a northerly direction towards the distant hills, walking in companionable silence for an hour or so, both men appreciating, each in his own way, the natural beauty of their surroundings. For the past kilometer or so, their present pathway had begun to wind upwards, and when they reached a suitable vantage point Kirk called a halt for a few minutes so that both could enjoy the breathtaking scene far in front of them.

Soft, white cotton-wool clouds scudded playfully across the azure sky, while golden sunlight illuminated the distant peaks and gently undulating valleys, flashes of blue hinting at partly concealed lakes and rivers.

Kirk breathed deeply, allowing his lungs to fill with fresh, clear mountain air.

"Hmm! Do you know, it's been five years since I was last here, and Kynuzia is just as I remember it - the ideal place for a relaxing shore leave. On that occasion I was on my own, but I vowed that if ever I was lucky enough to return, I would bring someone with me who would appreciate it as much as I did."

"Yet you have not returned - even once - in all that time," Spock remarked, "although it is very obvious - even to me - that this world made a deep impression on you."

Kirk shrugged. "I guess lack of opportunity was the main reason, or... perhaps I had yet to find someone with whom I wished to share this experience. Until now."

He regarded the Vulcan closely for a long moment, allowing Spock a little time to recognise the import of his last remark, seeing his friend's expression alter from puzzlement to understanding as realisation dawned.

At Kirk's words Spock felt a warm glow begin to suffuse his entire being; to be wanted and accepted for himself was a precious gift to a man who considered himself neither Vulcan nor Human. Yet, from the beginning, Kirk had always accepted him for what he was, not for what he could be; had never tried to change him in any way. A feeling akin to gratitude surged through him that Kirk had thought of him, preferred his company above anyone else's. He felt he had to acknowledge his appreciation in some way.

"I wish to... thank you... for asking me to accompany you on this trip," he said, somewhat hesitantly.

Kirk smiled, having spent the last few minutes watching the myriad emotions fleetingly cross the sombre features of his companion. And who was it had said that Vulcans were emotionless beings? He chuckled inwardly. Whoever it was, he ought to be here now, he thought.

Deciding it was time to lighten the atmosphere somewhat, Kirk remarked, "Come on - we've still about an hour of sunlight left, and I'd like to make camp before darkness falls. It's no fun being caught out on the hillside during Kynuzia's night hours. It can get decidedly chilly."

At the mention of the fall in temperature Spock shuddered and hurriedly hefted his back-pack, eager to continue their journey.

"I thought that would get you moving," Kirk laughed as he took the lead once more, thus missing the look of disgust the Vulcan threw at his retreating back.

After a further half an hour's walk, they came upon a suitable camp site which appeared to have been designed with them in mind. The area was quiet, secluded and completely hidden away from the outside world. Thick green grass

formed a rich carpet beneath their feet, and the clearing itself was partly surrounded on one side by trees, which led deeper into the forest, and on the other side a natural projection had been formed in the hillside, providing adequate shelter from the elements if the need arose. Further investigation revealed a fairly deep cave, almost hidden by the dense undergrowth and foliage. Fresh water could be obtained from a nearby spring which fell, bubbling merrily, to a natural lake situated a short, brisk walk away.

Within no time at all the two men had broken out their camping equipment and claimed the territory for their own - at least, for the time being. Kirk collected water from the spring and brewed tea for Spock and coffee for himself, while the Vulcan made a simple though satisfying meal for them both.

They sat for a long time over the scant remains of their supper, talking quietly, getting to know each other a little better, and gradually relaxing together as the warmth of their new-found friendship asserted itself; until, tired out from the day's exertions and the unaccustomed exposure to fresh air, they decided, as one, on an early night.

Kirk glanced with an expression of some distaste at the standard issue tent provided by Starfleet, and came to an immediate decision. Reaching in, he retrieved his bed-roll and proceeded to shake it out, all the while aware of Spock's curious gaze fixed on him.

"It's such a beautiful night, I couldn't bear to spend it cooped up in there. At least out here I can pretend I'm close to the stars," he offered by way of explanation; then, after the briefest of hesitations he said, "Share it with me."

Spock paused for a moment, obviously considering, before nodding briefly. Remembering Kirk's earlier warning about the fall in night-time temperatures, he burrowed deeply into his sleeping bag and inched closer to the warmth of the campfire which separated the two men. With a contented sigh, he was soon asleep.

Watching his friend through the flickering firelight, Kirk allowed a slight smile to play about his lips. He knew now that he had been right to ask Spock to accompany him on this shore leave: the next few days were going to be very, very special. Turning over, he settled himself comfortably, and with a last, lingering look at the stars, within moments he too was asleep.

* * *

The following days slipped away in a haze of relaxation, sun-filled hours engaged in swimming, fishing and exploring the immediate area, although by mutual consent neither man strayed too far away, preferring to remain close to the original campsite.

During the first few days, Spock had found it difficult to adjust to a life outside the controlled environment of the Enterprise, but eventually, as the magic of Kymuzia began to weave its spell, he started to unbend, to relax, and - if he was honest with himself - to enjoy this very welcome break from routine. Kirk's enthusiasm was contagious, and Spock found himself looking forward to each new day with renewed vigour.

On the fifth day, halfway through their leave, they had made their accustomed journey to the lakeside for their early morning swim - an activity which had almost become a ritual. However, on this occasion only Kirk had taken advantage of the cool, inviting waters of the lake, while Spock preferred to sit on the bank and observe: swimming was not one of his favourite pastimes, and one to be avoided if at all possible. Now, he was content merely to lie on the bank and watch while his Captain amused himself in the water: diving and then surfacing, cutting through the water like an arrow, with smooth strong strokes, before turning to float lazily on his back, his face upturned to the cloudless sky, the early morning sunlight turning his sandy hair to gold. He was totally relaxed and at peace with himself.

Taking advantage of his quietness, Spock allowed his mind to wander back over the preceeding days, living again the shared moments of joy and fun, amazed at himself that he could adapt so easily to such a changed life-style. Already they had begun to discover a great deal about each other. Quiet evenings were spent exchanging stories and anecdotes about their childhood, and what it was like to grow up on two entirely different worlds, learning much about the lives they had led prior to joining Starfleet, and the influences and decisions they had made which had taken them along the path that had ultimately led to the Enterprise.

At first, Spock had found it difficult to overcome his natural shyness, to talk about himself on a personal level, revealing things which, until now, he had kept carefully hidden from the outside world; but Kirk's easy manner and obvious interest in his background did much to draw the Vulcan out of his self-imposed shell. Spock never ceased to marvel that this enigmatic Human was interested in him as a person, that after a period of just nine months he already felt as though he had known Kirk for a lifetime. It was difficult to believe that five days could have such a profound effect on a relationship.

"You're very quiet."

A warm voice broke in on his reverie, and Spock turned his head to meet laughing hazel eyes as Kirk pulled himself out of the water and proceeded to towel himself dry.

"What profound thoughts are we considering today, Mr. Spock?" The tone was light, teasing.

Spock was silent for some moments, carefully considering his answer. He wanted this Human to know just how much he appreciated his company, wanted to express exactly how he felt, and realising how important it was to both of them that he give the correct reply.

"I wish... to thank you for permitting me to share all of this with you." He made a sweeping gesture to encompass the beauty which surrounded them. "It is a very precious gift to one such as I, for until now I had always regarded myself as something of a loner... an outsider, a state forced on me as a result of my dual heritage, and thus making it difficult for me to be accepted by either world. To know that someone cares enough to..." He hesitated, wondering if perhaps he had said too much. "Please forgive me. It is difficult for me to express myself in words as easily as you, but..." somewhat hopefully "...I thought you might understand..."

"I do understand." The reply was immediate, without a trace of hesitation. "You know, Spock, this is the first chance I've had in a long time to actually relax, to be myself, without having to maintain the rigorous pose of the efficient Starship Captain - and you are the one who's made it possible." He Couldn't help smiling at Spock's look of puzzlement as he absorbed that last remark.

"It's true," Kirk continued. "From that first day, from that first moment of contact when I beamed aboard the Enterprise and you were there to meet me, I sensed a certain 'spark' or 'chemistry' between us. Immediately I felt that here was someone on whom I could depend for loyalty and support, and believe me, it was an awesome thought: until then I had guarded my independence jealously, and I didn't know whether I could bring myself to depend on another person so totally.

"Mind you, you didn't make it easy for me, did you, Spock? Although I could sense your quiet support of my decisions, your silent approval of my actions, you still maintained a slightly cool and formal manner towards me, as though you were keeping your distance, and I knew then I'd have to earn your respect, that it would take time for you to transfer your loyalty from Chris Pike to me. Yet underneath... underneath I sensed a certain intangible something... as though you wanted us to be friends, and that was somehow very important to me... to both of us." Kirk fell silent for a moment, lost in

thought, his mind transported back to those early days when he had felt so unsure of himself, so alone, until he had sensed the Vulcan's presence at his side, quietly supportive. He continued, softly musing.

"Vulcan and Human - outwardly different, yet inwardly... perhaps the same. Both lonely, both searching for... what? Strange that I should have found such peace and calm with someone not of my race - and yet, in other ways, not so strange..."

"You were the one person who understood how I felt when Gary died, you were the one whose carefully spoken words of comfort gave me the courage to face another day, to meet the future with renewed determination and hope... And over the last nine months you've always been there when I've needed you... You thanked me earlier for asking you along on this trip. Well, now it's my turn. Thank you for joining me. Your presence here... your friendship... mean a great deal to me."

At last Kirk fell silent, surprised at having revealed so much of a part of himself he usually kept well-hidden from outsiders. He gave a rueful smile. "Sorry - I didn't mean to go on like that, but there were certain things I wanted - needed to say, and I guess there are times when I do tend to talk too much... Forgive me if I've offended you in any way..."

"You have not - could not - offend me," Spock replied, very softly. He was somewhat awed that Kirk had revealed so much of his inner being, but he felt a surge of warmth that this remarkable Human could confide in him, of all people. "Believe me, Jim, I understand your words and their meaning far better than perhaps you realise. Like you, I joined Starfleet in an attempt to find amongst the stars that peace for which I had been searching most of my life, and which I was unable to find on my home world. That peace has eluded me... until now..." He hesitated, obviously remembering those years aboard the Enterprise, remembering a time before Kirk had assumed command, before that magnetic personality had made such a profound effect on him, and in such a short space of time... The well-modulated voice resumed its narrative.

"You mentioned Captain Pike and my 'feeling' of loyalty towards him: that is true. I shall always remain intensely loyal - and grateful - to him, for he was one of the first people to make me feel that at last I had found a real 'home' on board the Enterprise, a place where I could be accepted for myself. We had a good working relationship, and in his own way he tried very hard to breach the self-imposed barriers I had erected around myself as a means of protection from the outside world. But as for friendship... I still believed that something was missing, that my search was not yet complete. Then you came, and..."

Spock abruptly stopped talking, half afraid that he might have said too much, revealed too much. What was it about this Human that he could turn Spock's well-ordered existence upside down with just a look, a smile, a gesture? Eventually he plucked up courage to meet Kirk's gaze, and as brown eyes met hazel, and intangible something passed between them, igniting the tentative flames of friendship and fanning them into greater life. And in that instant a bond was formed - somewhat tenuously - but a bond which would grow in strength as the years progressed.

In an attempt to lighten what could so easily become a highly-charged emotional moment, Kirk was the first to break the eye contact and remark, "I think I'll have another dip before breakfast. Are you sure you won't come with me? The water really is pleasant, you know."

"Perhaps so - but I think I will remain here, if you don't mind. I find it very difficult to understand this obsession you seem to have with aquatic pursuits of any - and all - kinds," Spock replied, adopting his best lecture-giving tone.

Throwing his friend a look of feigned disgust, Kirk leaped to his feet. As he turned away he muttered very quietly under his breath, "Coward!" momentarily forgetting the Vulcan's very superior powers of hearing.

Acting entirely on impulse, and without the slightest effort on his part, Spock quickly extended his foot, and very neatly - and expertly - tripped Kirk up. With an exclamation of stunned surprise the until now dignified Captain of the Enterprise found himself face downwards in the water in a tangle of flailing arms and legs. Seconds later he surfaced, coughing and spluttering, to find his First Officer regarding his antics with a certain degree of undisguised amusement, an unmistakeable twinkle in the depths of the dark eyes.

"You wait, Spock - just you wait! I'll get you for this!" Kirk shouted in mock anger, but he was unable to maintain the facade for long, however. A smile began to play about his lips, and then, as the humour of the situation suddenly struck him, he felt the laughter welling up inside him, to erupt in a burst of uncontrolled giggles.

Spock's eyebrows followed their usual upward path as the sound assaulted his sensitive ears.

"Really, Jim, I fail to see precisely what it is you find so amusing," he remarked, the usually mellow voice containing a slight trace of what might have been regarded as something akin to irritability in anyone else.

The comment only served to send Kirk yet again into peals of delighted laughter. Eventually he sobered enough to swim towards the edge of the lake where, with a wicked gleam in his eye and an expression of bland innocence on his face, he extended his hand and asked, "Will you help me out, Spock?"

Warily the Vulcan shook his head, not quite trusting Kirk's motives. "You will not 'catch me out', I believe is the customary phrase, as easily as that, Jim. I have lived among Humans long enough to be able to recognise their little ... idiosyncracies. Now - didn't you say something about breakfast...?"

Surprised at Spock's intuitive insight, but admitting defeat - at least for the moment - Kirk gave a rueful grin. "In a minute - I haven't had that second swim yet - despite your efforts to the contrary!"

Turning gracefully, he disappeared beneath the water and struck out towards a rocky promontory he had noticed several hundred metres from his present position, and which would suffice as a natural diving board. Within minutes he was out of the water and scaling the gentle slope, his hands and feet finding suitably-placed holds. Once at the top he paused to catch his breath and wave to his companion before taking up a rather precarious position at the edge of the cliff. Breathing deeply of the cool, fresh air he counted to three before executing a perfect swallow dive, his sudden entry breaking the calm waters. He touched the bottom of the lake, turned swiftly, and using the reflection of the sunlight on the lake as a guide, pushed himself back to the surface. He felt refreshed, invigorated, as he made his leisurely way over to where Spock was waiting for him. Unhurried, he climbed out of the water and slipped into a robe, while Spock gathered their few belongings together. Then, as one, they turned, heading back to the campsite in companionable silence, both relaxed and totally at ease with one another.

* * *

The storm, when it came, was sudden and unexpected, overwhelming in its intensity. It was late afternoon on their last day on Kynuzia, and while the two men busied themselves around the camp, lighting a fire, preparing an evening meal, all the everyday chores which accompany life out of doors, Kirk kept casting surreptitious glances towards a rapidly-darkening sky, watching the gathering storm clouds with a certain degree of unease. Dropping the pile of firewood he was carrying, he paused for a moment to listen, finding the silence almost overpowering.

"Can you hear anything, Spock?"

Spock shook his head. "An unnatural quiet appears to have descended over everything. It is almost as if the bird and animal life is poised, waiting expectantly for something to happen."

"Yeah - for the heavens to open and the rain to fall!" Kirk replied. "I think we'd better move our supplies and equipment into that cave we discovered on our first day here. If I remember correctly, the storms on Kynuzia are brief - but intense. And if this storm is anything like the ones we used to experience in Iowa when I was a child, I estimate we have about five or ten minutes to complete our task. I don't know about you, but I don't relish the thought of a soaking!"

With calm, unhurried actions the two Starfleet officers, trained to deal with such emergencies as this, began systematically to move their belongings into the cave. Even so, it took several trips, and by the time they had finished the rains had begun to fall, gently at first, and then increasing in intensity, soaking them through within minutes and forcing them to scurry for shelter.

"What a way to spend our last evening!" Kirk spluttered as they made their hasty dive for cover. It was impossible to remain miserable for long, however; from their ring-side seat at the mouth of the cave, they were able to watch the storm in all its glory.

Dazzling white and silver-lined leaden clouds meant that the darkness had fallen like a curtain all around them, to be alleviated every now and then by flashes of lightning illuminating the vague silhouettes of the surrounding trees. The roar of the thunder gradually increased in volume as the storm rapidly approached, until both men were convinced that the elements were engaged in one universal battle directly over their heads. And through it all the rain continued to fall - not gentle summer rain drops, but persistent 'stair rods' which struck the ground with immense force, obscuring their vision of their former campsite.

Grimacing at the sound of the thunder - a sound which was playing havoc with his highly sensitive hearing - Spock moved away from the cave's entrance: he was cold, wet and none-too-happy with their present situation, and felt that he would function more efficiently once he had changed into dry clothing and had something to eat.

Kirk, meanwhile, remained in the cave's opening, completely absorbed with the storm raging without, his gaze fixed on the ever-changing shapes and patterns in the clouds, remembering his childhood days when he had believed that the rain clouds resembled mountains or huge towers, anything which could fire a child's imagination. His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Spock's voice from behind him.

"Jim - unless you wish to succumb to pneumonia, I suggest you change out of those wet clothes. Besides which," he added as an afterthought, "Dr. McCoy was not very taken with your intention to ask me to accompany you on this expedition. Imagine the comments I will have to endure if you return to the ship in something less than perfect condition."

Kirk turned in time to catch the look of pleading in his friend's eyes - eyes which seemed to say, //Spare me that - please!//

With a resigned sigh Kirk moved away from the mouth of the cave - somewhat reluctantly, it must be admitted - and left the scene which had so fascinated him, although it was doubtful whether he could see very much through the almost blinding rain.

"Okay - you win... only don't you turn into a 'mother hen' as well. I have enough trouble dealing with Bones!"

Kirk was as good as his word. Within moments he had changed and, after laying his wet clothes over the nearby boulders to dry, he proceeded to light a fire so they could finish preparing their meal - and keep warm, as the temperature in the cave was decidedly chilly.

Ten minutes later, after much cursing and grumbling, the recalcitrant fire was no nearer being lit. "I wish I'd brought my phaser with me," Kirk murmured.

Spock raised a questioning eyebrow. "Really, Jim, I fail to see whay you should need a weapon on this peaceful world. The animal life is completely harmless, and you said yourself the Kynuzians are a very scattered people - I cannot see that they would intend us any harm."

Kirk grinned at the Vulcan's reply, his frustrations momentarily forgotten. "Silly - I don't want to use it as a weapon! I just thought it would be useful for heating up those rocks over there - you know, for warmth. The last thing I want is a shivering Vulcan on my hands!"

Spock failed to respond to Kirk's teasing, but the expression of disdain on his face was sufficient: he gestured to his companion to move away from the offending fire, and almost immediately, as a result of careful nurturing, small flames began to curl around the wood and twigs. The task successfully completed, with the minimum amount of fuss, he sat back on his heels and calmly glanced across at his friend: if Kirk hadn't known the Vulcan better, he would have sworn that Spock's expression was decidedly smug!

"Why is it that Vulcans are always so damn clever at everything?" Kirk muttered, partly under his breath.

"Jim - there is always a logical solution to every problem..." Spock began, before being interrupted by a laughing Kirk.

"I know! I know!" he exclaimed. "You've told me that often enough!"

Their evening meal was eaten in comparative silence. For the first time since their arrival on Kynuzia, Kirk seemed quiet, preoccupied, almost withdrawn into himself, and Spock became concerned that he might have said or done something to cause such a marked change in his friend. Kirk was restless, seeming unable to concentrate on anything for longer than five minutes at a time, and when he got up - for the umpteenth time - and crossed over to the cave's entrance to peer into the gloom outside, Spock decided it was time to broach the subject, even if it meant incurring Kirk's displeasure.

"Jim - is anything wrong?" he asked somewhat tentatively.

Kirk stopped his pacing. "Wrong?"

"Yes - you seem... engrossed in thought tonight, as though you have something on your mind. Are you troubled? I trust I have not offended you in any way?"

"Offended me...?" Kirk began, a puzzled frown creasing his forehead. Then as understanding dawned, his expression cleared. "Hell, no - it's nothing to do with you: it's me. I mean..." He paused, throwing Spock an apologetic look. "Sorry, I'm making a complete mess of this - let me start again. My 'mood', or whatever you like to call it, has nothing to do with you - I always feel like this at the end of a shore leave, particularly one which has been as pleasant as this. I guess it's the finality of it all that gets to me - to think that this time tomorrow we'll be back aboard the Enterprise... that in a few days all of this will have become a hazy memory..." He broke off, staring wistfully into the fire.

"But Jim - surely you want to return to the Enterprise? Your ship means everything to you." Spock had never seen Kirk in this kind of mood before, and he felt ill-equipped to deal with it.

"Of course I want to return to the Enterprise - she's my home. It's just that... these last few days here - with you - have shown me that there are more important things in life..."

"There will be other shore leaves, other occasions when we can try to recapture that which we have shared here," Spock replied, softly.

"Will there?"

"Of course."

"But things won't be the same... they can't." Kirk's voice took on a

pensive quality. "It's impossible to put the clock back again, isn't it, Spock? No matter how hard we try, we can never relive these moments again."

"Jim - nothing is ever the same. You know, perhaps better than anyone, that changes do occur - are inevitable... and if you are honest with yourself you wouldn't want it any other way. Without such changes... new challenges... you would stagnate, and that isn't the James Kirk I have come to know."

"But this shore leave was special, wasn't it, Spock? You sense it too..."

Spock nodded. "These last ten days have been a beginning for us, and as the weeks pass, our friendship cannot help but grow stronger. At least we shall have our memories, for no-one can take those away from us. What we have shared here has become very precious to me, and I do not intend to allow such feelings to die."

Kirk was silent for a long time after Spock had finished speaking, carefully considering the Vulcan's words and the commitment he had just made. He smiled affectionately at his friend before murmuring quietly, "Mr. Spock, you never cease to amaze me. Has anyone ever told you what an excellent psychologist you would make should you ever decide to leave Starfleet?"

Spock's reply was immediate. "Please do not let Dr. McCoy hear you say that - I would never hear the last of it."

"It's okay, Spock - your secret's safe with me. But seriously, though, don't let Bones get to you too much - it's just his manner. You know how he likes to bait people - you in particular!"

"I know. Believe me, I understand the good doctor far better than he perhaps realises," Spock replied.

Kirk didn't answer, but a single thought crossed his mind. //Yes, Spock - I believe you do.//

* * *

The following day Kirk and Spock awoke to a world new-born in its freshness. It had stopped raining during the early hours of the morning, and although it was still quite early the sun was already high in the sky, and the air felt cool and refreshing, with a soft breeze gently caressing the surrounding trees. Drops of moisture hung suspended from branches and leaves, hovered uncertainly for a few seconds, and then continued their downward journey. It was difficult to imagine the storm which had raged the previous evening when they surveyed the calm and peaceful world which greeted them now.

Both men were slightly subdued as they breakfasted on what little remained of their provisions, both sensing that the inevitable could be delayed no longer: the day of departure had arrived at last, the moment which Kirk had been dreading had finally caught up with them.

With an efficiency instilled in them as a result of several years at Starfleet Academy, they collected and packed away their equipment and belongings; the passenger shuttle from Kynuzia to the Starbase would be leaving at mid-day, so if they were to leave the campsite now, they could take their time reaching the terminal. As Kirk had remarked, they might as well make the most of their final day's leave, before preparing to pick up the threads of their interrupted lives.

Before leaving they made a last-minute tour of all their old haunts, silently making their own farewells to the places which had become so familiar to them over the last ten days, and which held such happy memories for them both. Then, after reaffirming their pledge to return one day, they began their journey down the hillside to the waiting shuttle - and home.

* * *

On their arrival at Starbase 20 they were met - as previously arranged - by an exuberant McCoy and an equally happy Scott. If Kirk and Spock were just

a little withdrawn and preoccupied, it went unnoticed by their two companions, however: both the newcomers were too wrapped up in their own excitement to take much notice of their rather silent Captain and First Officer, or to attach much importance to it; and it was with a feeling of relief that Kirk contacted the ship and requested transportation.

No sooner had they materialised on board the Enterprise than Kirk left the transporter pads and headed for the door.

"Jim, where are you going now?" McCoy's slightly peeved tone of voice stopped Kirk in his tracks. Somewhat sheepishly, he turned to face the doctor.

"I thought I'd go up on the bridge for a short while," he said, adding by way of explanation, "I want to satisfy myself that everything is all right."

McCoy smiled at his Captain's words: Kirk wouldn't change, no matter how much or how little time he spent away from his beloved Enterprise.

"Well - I like that! We haven't seen you in ten days, and all you're interested in is the ship! I thought we could spend some time together - you know, catch up on the latest news..."

"Later, Bones - later!" Kirk replied, laughing in spite of himself. "At the moment I don't think I could face one of your 'post shore leave' sessions!" He turned to the silent Vulcan. "Mr. Spock - would you care to join me in a quiet game of chess later this evening? I feel in a lucky mood tonight."

"Certainly, Captain, that would be most pleasant - although I fail to see what luck has to do with it. On the other hand, knowing your usual chess form... you may be right."

At Spock's words McCoy did a double-take, completely taken aback by the Vulcan's bantering tone. This was not the same First Officer who had left the Enterprise ten days ago: the Vulcan had changed somewhat as a result of this shore leave, and McCoy made a promise to himself that he would try to understand Kirk's choice of friend just a little better. There was obviously more to this Vulcan than met the eye!

"I'll see you later, then," Kirk replied, before taking leave of his companions and heading towards the bridge.

As the door closed on the retreating figure of the Captain, Spock turned to McCoy. "If you would excuse me, Doctor, I have some matters to attend to in my quarters..."

"Aye - and I must away to my engines!" Scotty interrupted, before McCoy could speak.

Within seconds, the doctor was left alone - with the exception of the Transporter Chief.

"Mr. Kyle - do you ever get the feeling that you're not wanted?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Oh - forget it," McCoy mumbled. "Well, I suppose I'd better go to Sickbay - Lord knows what's been happening down there while I've been away. There doesn't seem to be anything else to do around here..."

* * *

A few hours later Kirk entered his cabin: his presence was no longer required on the bridge, and he wanted a couple of minutes alone before Spock arrived for their game of chess. As he allowed his mind to dwell fondly on the memories of the preceeding days, his attention was drawn to a small package on his desk. His curiosity aroused, he walked over and picked it up, his fingers lightly examining the intricate designs on the sides and lid. On top was a card, with the words -

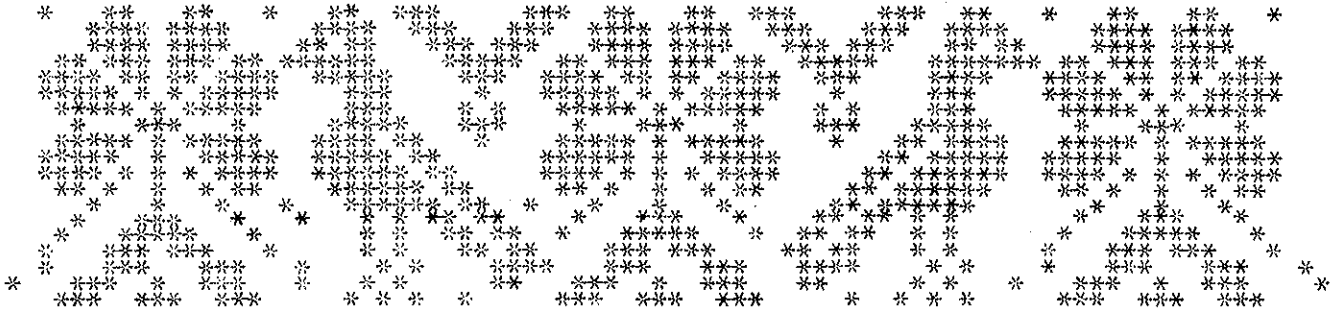
"To someone who understands the true meaning of IDIC."

The handwriting was unmistakably Spock's.

Feeling slightly over-awed, Kirk very carefully lifted the lid. Inside, nestling on a bed of black velvet, was a Vulcan IDIC.

Somewhat choked, and understanding anew the meaning of Spock's note, Kirk slowly lifted the IDIC from its home and fastened the chain around his neck, slipping the medallion beneath his uniform shirt.

The IDIC would be with him always - and somehow, he knew, so would Spock.



BRIEF OASIS

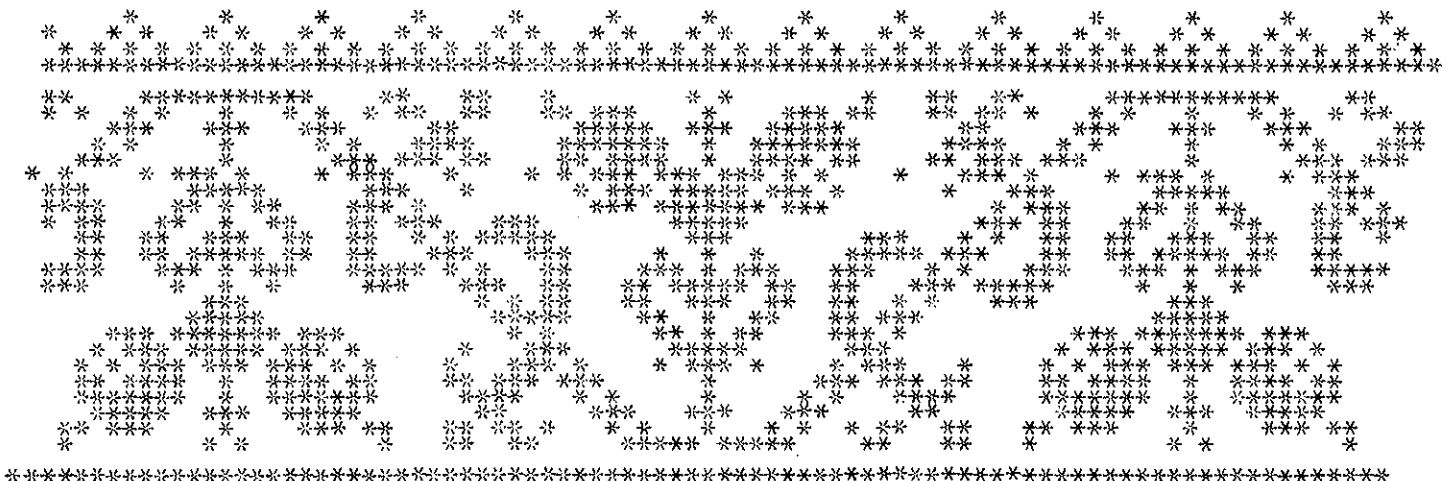
Nausea slides from belly to throat,
Unquenchable anguish turns my head away
From yet another slaughter.
Scattered like broken dolls, my brave men lay,
A testament to yet another Klingon war!

... and I cannot go on...
... not any more!

Soft tread beside me,
Comforting pools of Vulcan eyes lock their
Strength to mine.
The oasis there is fleeting, conjured only for me...

Massive willpower pulls my shoulders back
To face the scene once more,
Sore in heart and body,
Yet suddenly now finding the courage
To face the terrible duty in store...

Gladys Oliver



DIPLOMACY AT ALL COSTS

by

Vicki Richards

The shuttlecraft Galileo II sped through the starlit heavens on its way to rendezvous with the Enterprise. The Galileo was returning from an important conference on Epsilon Canaris III; now that war no longer threatened the planet, the people of that world were anxious to show their willingness to aid the Federation in any way they could, and in response the Federation had held a conference there, mainly concerning alleged Tellarite grievances which, imaginary or not, had to be settled before the Tellarites could stir up any trouble - something for which they possessed a considerable talent.

Returning from this conference aboard the Galileo were Captain James T. Kirk, First Officer Spock, Dr. McCoy, Ensign Chekov, an Enterprise Security guard - and two very touchy Tellarite ambassadors, who hadn't got all they wanted at the conference, and who Kirk had to get to Starbase 8 without any incidents. 'Use diplomacy at all costs,' his orders had been; and just how difficult those orders were likely to be in the carrying out was already becoming apparent.

The two Tellarites, Ambassadors Golev and Kav, had been arguing ever since they had left the conference. They argued with each other, with the members of the Enterprise crew escorting them, and when they couldn't think of anything else to argue about, they generally grumbled and picked faults in everyone and everything. They had just begun an unfortunate discourse on the innumerable faults of Terrans in general and starship captains in particular, and out of the corner of his eye Kirk could see that Ensign Pavel Chekov appeared to be getting rather hot under the collar. Not that he was the only one; the Tellarites' pointed remarks were beginning to annoy Kirk too, and at times he had to bite his tongue to prevent himself from making an untimely and uncharacteristic acid reply. Diplomatic missions! Sometimes he thought they'd never end.

"Captain Kirk," said Ambassador Golev testily, stressing the first word so that his listeners were left in no doubt as to which Captain his derogatory remarks had referred, "are we ever going to rendezvous with your ship, or has your First Officer succeeded in getting us lost?"

That did it! Kirk opened his mouth to make a stinging reply, but was interrupted before he could speak by Spock.

"Ambassador Golev," said Spock stonily, without turning from the shuttlecraft's controls, "Vulcans do not 'get lost', as you put it, and I would have believed that you knew that, as it seems that Tellarites know everything."

Kirk could hardly believe his ears. No-one else had noticed it, but he was certain he hadn't imagined the Vulcan's emphasis on the last word. The Tellarites getting to Spock? Surely not!

Golev's derisive remark to the Enterprise's Science Officer appeared to be the last straw as far as Chekov's temper was concerned, however. The young Russian opened his mouth to say something rather hotly, and Kirk could see diplomatic disaster looming. The situation was saved by McCoy, who was sitting nearest to Chekov; he leaned over and spoke to the navigator in a low voice.

"Forget it, Chekov - it'll only cause trouble for the Captain," he whispered urgently. "We'll soon be back on the ship, and they'll be out of our way. Me - I'll just be glad to get out of this dress uniform!"

Chekov closed his mouth, but he still looked furious. The Tellarites, however, hadn't noticed anything at all; they were far too busy arguing with each other. Kirk breathed a sigh of relief. What a mission!

The Galileo made the rendezvous with the Enterprise without further incident. As they thankfully stepped out onto the Hangar Deck, and the Tellarites were

escorted away to their quarters, the general relief was obvious.

McCoy said he had something to check in Sickbay, and he left them, tugging irritably at the neck of his uniform as he went. Kirk and Spock made their way to the Bridge. Kirk waited until he had given the order for the turbolift to take them there before he asked Spock the question he had been wanting to ask ever since Golev had questioned the Vulcan's navigational ability.

"Spock," he began innocently, "you wouldn't by any chance have been just a little annoyed back there, would you?"

"Annoyed, Captain?" said Spock, equally innocently.

"Yes," said Kirk. "When Golev suggested you might have got the Galileo lost. You seemed a little... irritated."

"Really, Captain," said Spock, eyebrow on the rise. "I was merely pointing out a simple fact for the Ambassador's benefit. And I fail to see how I could possibly have mislaid the shuttlecraft, considering we were sitting in it at the time."

Kirk knew he was beaten, as usual, but he smiled to himself nonetheless. He was just about to accuse Spock of making a joke, but at that moment they arrived at the Bridge, and he stepped down to his command chair still grinning. Spock came to stand beside him, hands behind his back, imperturbable as ever.

Kirk gave the order for the Enterprise to go into warp flight, and the great Starship sped on her way, hopefully with her irritable cargo stowed safely in their quarters.

Some time later Kirk left the Bridge, off duty for a while. Leaving Spock in charge, he entered the turbolift and the doors closed obediently behind him. He was tired, not only from the strain of the impossible task of trying to keep the two Tellarite ambassadors happy, but also from the long wrangling at the conference; he knew he should rest, but instead of going to his quarters he sent the lift to Sickbay and went in search of McCoy. He felt that a quiet conversation with McCoy, since Spock was unable to join him at that moment, might take his mind off his immediate problems, for a little while at least.

Kirk entered Sickbay to find McCoy at his desk, apparently busy at something. When he saw his friend enter, he looked up.

"What's wrong, Jim? Golev and Kav given you a headache?" said McCoy with a wry grin.

"You might not be so far wrong, at that," replied Kirk, grinning back. "Am I interrupting, Bones? Are you doing something important?"

McCoy shook his head and gestured for Kirk to take a seat. "It's always important, Jim, but it's only routine," he answered. "Just checking some medical reports - I can always finish them later. Something bothering you?"

Kirk pulled a face, and sat down. "It is those Tellarites," he said grimly, "and you're right about the headache, too. Those two are enough to get on anybody's nerves!"

"They certainly are," agreed McCoy with a grimace. "I must admit I am not looking forward to meeting them again at the dinner tonight. How they ever agree on anything beats me."

"I'm not sure if they ever do!" said Kirk. "Oh, and I meant to thank you for stopping Chekov from blowing his top on the Galileo - it could have been disastrous. I must speak to him about that."

"Don't be too hard on him, Jim. I nearly said something myself, and so did you - not to mention Spock."

"I know," said Kirk, nodding his head. "And what Spock did say was enough to cause a diplomatic incident - it's a good job the ambassadors were too busy arguing to notice properly what he said."

"Did you ask him about it?" asked McCoy, grinning wickedly. "I'll bet he wouldn't admit they were actually getting to him."

"You're right - he wouldn't," laughed Kirk. "But I hope he doesn't say anything else to them. I know Spock will only say what's 'logical', but can you imagine the effect Vulcan logic is likely to have on Tellarite temper?"

"Mmmm - I see what you mean," answered McCoy. "I know what effect it has on me sometimes. You going to warn him?"

Kirk shook his head. "Spock knows the importance of this mission as well as I do. No, I won't say anything. I'm just going to keep my fingers crossed that everyone on the ship manages to keep their temper until this trip's over, although I suppose that's a bit too much to hope for as far as our passengers are concerned."

McCoy began to say something, but at that moment the Sickbay intercom went, and a rather harrassed-sounding Ensign asked for the Captain.

Kirk went over and flicked the switch. "Kirk here - what is it, Ensign?"

There was a slight pause, and a little nervous coughing, before the Ensign continued. "Er... well, sir, it's... er..."

"Go on, man - what's wrong?" demanded Kirk, suddenly feeling alarmed.

"I'm in Engineering, sir, and there's a bit of trouble - I think you'll have to come down." The Ensign said it all in one breath, and very reluctantly, as if he had something to tell the Captain that the Captain wasn't going to like.

Kirk groaned inwardly. Something told him it just had to be something to do with the Tellarites. "Ensign," he said with exaggerated patience, "will you please tell me what the trouble is down there?"

"Well, sir," came the hurried answer, "It's like this. The two ambassadors came down to Engineering about twenty minutes ago - seems they wanted a look round. Then they started making remarks - you know Tellarites, sir - and, well, there's a bit of a fracas going on, sir."

"A what?!" Kirk groaned outwardly this time. Bang went his hopes of a peaceful trip. "Where's Mr. Scott? Is he doing anything about it?"

The Ensign paused again. "Actually, sir, Mr. Scott's right in the middle of it."

Now it was Kirk who found himself unable to speak. What in the universe had Golev and Kav done to make the reliable Scotty lose his temper? Insulted the Enterprise?

"I'll be right there. Kirk out."

"Jim?" McCoy looked as worried as Kirk felt.

"You'd better bring your medikit, Bones," said Kirk wryly. "I've a feeling you might need it."

Stopping only long enough to enable Kirk to contact Spock and request his presence in Engineering, Kirk and McCoy immediately set off at high speed. But not as quickly as Spock; the Vulcan somehow managed to get to Engineering in time to meet them at the door.

When those doors opened the sight that met their eyes was not exactly designed to bring calm to the heart of a certain Starship Captain with intergalactic diplomatic incidents on his mind.

Kav was lying on the floor, and it was quite obvious he hadn't fallen over. Golev, who was looking decidedly dazed, was being unceremoniously hauled to his feet by two of Scotty's men, his right eye puffy and closing. Over the pair of them stood Lieutenant-Commander Montgomery Scott, with a cut on his chin and a very red face - the picture of Highland wrath.

Kirk shot a helpless look at Spock, then turned his gaze on a very embarrassed Chief Engineer.

"Mr. Scott!"

"Ah'm sorry, Captain, but ye've nae idea whit ah've had tae put up with doon here!" Scotty didn't sound very repentant.

"Perhaps you would be so good as to tell us what happened, Mr. Scott," said Spock evenly, attempting to take some of the heat out of an explosive situation. The Vulcan knew what Kirk's orders had said, and knew only too well how bad for Kirk's career an incident like this could be.

"Yes, Scotty. You've got some explaining to do - and right now!" ordered Kirk in the command tone.

"Well, sir," said Scotty, slightly sheepishly, "Ye ken whit Tellarites are like. These two, Captain... they came in here - nae permission, mind ye - then they started - pokin', pryin', insultin' ... They called the Enterprise a flyin' saucer, sir!"

"And?" Kirk had thought it might have been something like that.

"An' then... an' then... They started sniggerin', and they asked where the sparkin' plugs went, sir!" Scotty spluttered with indignation. "An' I just couldna' take any more, an'... Ah'm sorry, Captain."

For a moment Kirk felt the dreadful temptation to laugh. He glanced to his right, and saw Spock's eyebrows disappearing into his hairline. But any momentary amusement Kirk might have felt was extinguished by the sight of the now-recovered Kav coming towards him, an anything but friendly expression on his face.

"Captain Kirk!" snapped the furious Tellarite. "In all my days as an ambassador I have never experienced the treatment I have received on this ship! Your crew are ill-mannered, ignorant louts, and you can be sure I will be making a report about this!"

"Ambassador," said Kirk, forcing himself to politeness, "I assure you we all regret this incident, but I must point out that your remarks about my crew are totally innacurate."

"You dare to disagree with my colleague?" demanded Golev. "But I do not think you will have a crew much longer. Why, I..."

"Ambassadors," said Spock calmly, stepping in in an attempt to avoid disaster, "if you would step this way for a moment?"

Spock had seen that Jim Kirk was very close to losing his temper as well, and knowing that something had to be done quickly, he took the Tellariates a little way off from the others, and began to speak to them quietly.

"What is he saying to them, Jim?" asked McCoy exasperatedly. The Vulcan was speaking too quietly for anyone but the ambassadors to hear.

"I haven't the faintest idea, Bones, but I doubt that even Spock will be able to talk some sense into those two!"

However, it soon became apparent that whatever Spock was saying to them was having some effect, for Golev and Kav became very quiet, and began to look in Kirk and McCoy's direction in a manner which could only be described as nervous. Then without warning the Tellarites turned and quickly shuffled out of the room, without a word but with several strange glances at the Captain and the doctor. Spock came back over to them, and though his face betrayed nothing, Kirk could see very well that his Vulcan freind was amused by something.

"Well, Spock?"

"The Ambassadors have agreed to confine themselves to their quarters until we reach our destination, Captain," said Spock, without any explanation of how he had achieved this miracle.

Kirk looked at his friend - a little suspiciously, as well as incredulously. "Spock - I don't know how you did it, but thanks. You can tell me about it later. I'm just grateful they're out of my hair for a while, though you can be sure they're going to kick up all kinds of trouble at Starfleet over this."

That thought made him remember the cause of the incident. Kirk turned to the rather embarrassed-looking Scotty, who stood waiting to be confined to his quarters too.

"Which reminds me," said Kirk, glaring at the Chief Engineer threateningly.

"Cap'n?"

"Oh, never mind!"

* * *

Two hours later Kirk was again in Sickbay, sharing a drink with McCoy. Spock had taken himself off somewhere without saying why, and Kirk was occupied contemplating how many steps in rank he was likely to be reduced when Golev and Kav made their report to Starfleet - sufficiently embroidered, no doubt.

Then the doors opened, and Spock came in. No-one else would have noticed, but Kirk could tell immediately that Spock was bringing important news. McCoy was busy refilling their glasses, and the Vulcan came and stood in front of Kirk, his hands behind his back.

"The ambassadors will not be making that report, Jim," Spock said almost smugly. "You can stop worrying about what Starfleet Command will say."

Kirk looked up, startled. He knew Spock understood him better than anyone else, but sometimes his knowledge was more than uncanny. But what did he mean? Had Spock pulled off the impossible again?

"Spock?"

"It seems that the intercom in the Tellarites' cabin was accidentally... left on."

"You mean you bugged them?" McCoy had returned, and was listening intently.

"In effect, Doctor, yes - with the collaboration of Mr. Sulu in getting them out of their cabin for a few moments."

"With his conspiracy, you mean!" said McCoy, laughing. "What did you find out?"

"The indiscretions of Tellarites are well known," said Spock, "and I believed I might hear something to our advantage. Normally I would not consider invading anyone's privacy, but where the ambassadors are concerned, it had to be done." He didn't add, "For Jim's sake" - he didn't need to.

"What did they say, Spock?" McCoy was almost bursting.

"I recorded a conversation between our two guests which mainly concerned rather unflattering comparisons they were making between a very high-ranking Tellarite official and a certain Terran animal."

"You mean, they said he looked like a pig!" McCoy realised what Spock was getting at.

Kirk couldn't say anything - he was too busy choking.

"Indeed, Doctor, you are correct," answered Spock. "And when confronted with the evidence, they agreed to say no more about the incident in Engineering."

"Spock - you blackmailed them!" Kirk could hardly believe his ears. "But you haven't told us yet how you got them to stay in their cabin."

"Actually, Jim," said Spock seriously, "I merely reasoned with them that if they would not be confined they would no doubt persist in arguing with the crew, and would eventually be in need of your aid, Doctor. I informed them that

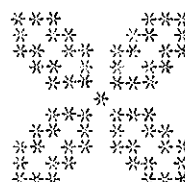
"Spock - I didn't know if I believe you or not!" Kirk finally managed to speak. He was greatly relieved, and thought the whole thing hysterical. "C'mon, Spock - we've got work to do."

And with that a still-laughing Kirk led the Vulcan from Sickbay, leaving behind them a very bewildered and more than slightly annoyed McCoy.

Yet as he watched his friends leave, McCoy smiled to himself. He didn't really know whether to be angry or to laugh. He hadn't had the last word, as usual, but one thing was sure; he had just been the victim of a Vulcan practical joke... and that just had to be illogical.



I have been alone too long, my friend.
For time without end I've simply existed
Unknowing of comfort or love.
I survived, somehow.
Then came you,
With your warmth and compassion which
You gave in full.
I was, and still am, unable to cope.
Please, forgive my reluctance,
Understand my fear.
I cannot give what I have always learned to hide.

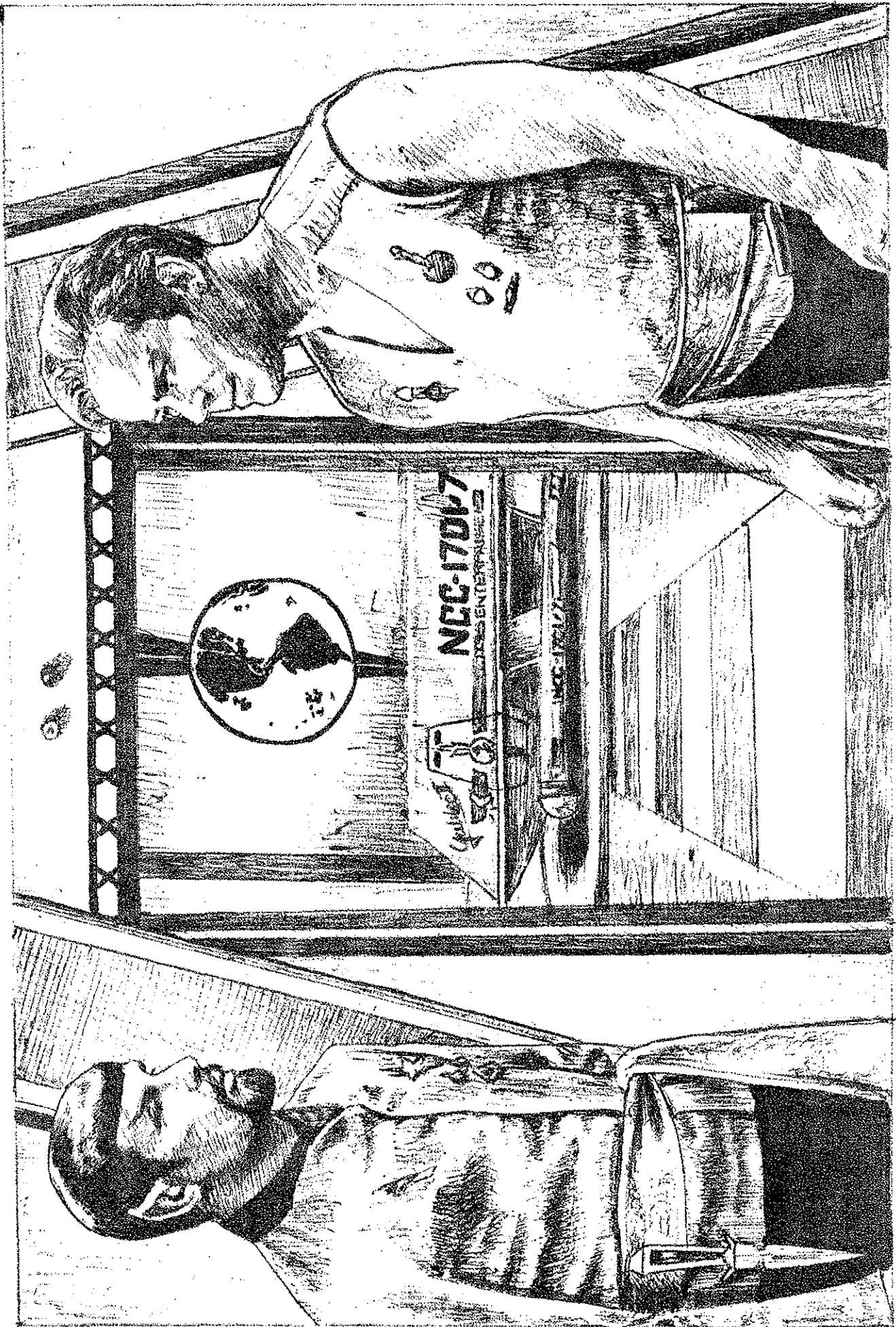


If my reactions are slow,
Do not believe I remain uncaring.
In years long gone
I constructed my wall and
Fear is its mortar.
Safe is the cocoon of one,
Strange quicksand conceals the fulfilment friendship brings.

I want to reach out -
(Do you realise my pain?)
I wish to give, but
I tread on new territory.
Wary of traps,
Frightened to feel,
Hopelessly entangled in my solitude.



My friend, I look at you and ask -
Be compassionate in your judgement.

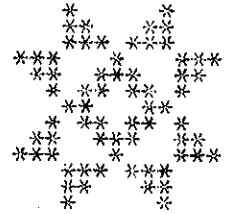




EVERY FORM OF REFUGE HAS ITS PRICE

BY

Crystal Ann Taylor



"Spock, what is it that will buy you?" Kirk yelled at the departing back of the beardless First Officer. "Power?"

The Vulcan stopped but did not turn around.

"Power, Spock? I can get that for you."

He lunged at the forcefield, but the Vulcan was already gone. Spock could not be doing this to him... not Spock... not now... not when he had just been beginning...

It had to be some macabre trick... Spock's strange appearance... his behavior... and that of the rest of the bridge crew... something wrong with the ENTERPRISE herself... subtle changes in her... familiar, yet different...

It did not seem possible that the Vulcan could be responsible for all this, yet what other explanation was there? Ever since he had beamed up from Halka, he had been hit with one incongruity after another.

Most of all, he found it hard to believe that he was being incarcerated... and by the one and only subordinate officer he had begun to trust.

When his expletives did nothing but echo through the empty corridor, Kirk turned from the forcefield and started to pace. Tinged with betrayal and disappointment, his anger raged uncontrollably.

McCoy grabbed his arm. "What in blazes's goin' on?"

"Has th'hale ship gaun loony?" Scott raved. "Whit're we doin' here? Yon pointed-eared loon ta'en ower? Got a' oor men tae mutiny wi' him?"

"You never should've trusted him!" Uhura screamed. "You should've slit his black..."

"Shut up, all of you," Kirk grated, shrugging off the doctor's hand. The fury in his eyes was dark and threatening, warning them to beware. "Give me time to think." He stalked to the bench and flopped down.

The others continued to mill around, fuming among themselves, supporting each other with all the invective they could muster. They did not approach their Captain, wisely choosing not to antagonize him further.

For his part, he did his best to ignore them, tuning out their mutterings, reminding himself how foolish it was to trust anyone.

It's like a nightmare come true, he thought.

For years, his relationship with his First Officer had been marked with wariness, for he would not give in to the urge to trust the Vulcan. Though Spock had frequently disclaimed any interest in command and had often protected Kirk when he did not have to, Kirk could not afford to take Spock's loyalty for granted - not as long as the Vulcan remained next in line. It did not matter that they were considered the best team the Empire had, because Kirk knew that if he relaxed his guard for a moment, he could very well be dead and the ENTERPRISE in the hands of a Vulcan Captain.

But he also recognized that it was becoming more and more difficult to maintain his mistrust of the Vulcan, especially as Spock continued to do some very disconcerting things. First was the unexpected rescue on the planet MX-123 when any other subordinate officer would have left him to die. After that, there were other times when he had owed his life to the Vulcan.

Kirk found it very annoying to be in Spock's debt. He knew that he should express his appreciation in some manner, but feared that if he did, it would

somehow be used against him. Survival instincts told him that it was better to maintain a fierce exterior than expose himself to danger.

Saving Spock's life on Demetzia when the Vulcan had been trapped under intense enemy fire had given him a chance to discharge some of the debt, but it didn't really even the score. He still did not fully understand why he had been so bent of rescuing the Vulcan, except that it had seemed important that Spock know that he, too, could be counted on when necessary - that he wasn't afraid to do ~~as much as~~ his First Officer.

From the moment when he first recognized the impulse to have faith in Spock, Kirk had fought the urge, reminding himself to rely on no-one but himself. Yet, it was straining even his ability to remain stubborn when he had to reconcile gratitude and appreciation with the need to maintain a self-protective indifference and distance. Curiosity as to why Spock seemed to protect him when all ambition should have produced the opposite reaction chiseled at the sheltering cocoon of aloofness Kirk wove around himself. There were times when Kirk wanted to bare his questions honestly, to reach out and seek some answers.

At those times, he could feel his well-constructed facade crack, and it frightened him. Vulnerability terrified him. And those moments of weakness - of longing to reach out and talk to another, of yearning to share some of the fright and burdens - had been increasing ever since Omicron Ceti III.

Ever since Omicron Ceti III, Kirk repeated to himself. Ever since you decided to leave Leila and to help me get the crew back, I've wanted...

He would have preferred to have left the intimidating Vulcan on the planet, but the whole crew had deserted under the spores' influence and he had needed Spock to help him get them back. He had been uncertain as to how to win the Vulcan back, but a combination of anger, violence and sweet talk had seemed to do the job.

However, it had left him with the uncomfortable impression that there was an underlying motivation to Spock's return that he did not quite understand - one that seemed to stay elusively beyond his grasp. He tried not to let what had occurred influence him in any way, yet despite his best efforts, it had forged another bond between them. A bond that was reinforced by every subsequent incident that seemed to mold them together.

It's hard to break something you can't see or understand, Kirk mused, especially when you aren't sure you want to.

Yet, it seemed impossible to ignore, no matter how hard he tried.

Besides, Kirk knew that lately it was becoming more and more comforting to feel that someone was on his side, standing behind him without question or apparent price. Whether or not he wanted to admit it, he needed someone to rely on, to talk to, to count on.

The events on Taranna II had proved that with undeniable clarity. And Kirk had not forgotten what he had learned there...

* * *

The intercom beeped insistently, interrupting the concentration of the two men correlating reports. The Captain reached across his desk, punching the switch. "Kirk here."

"Message coming through from Starfleet, Captain."

Kirk straightened in his chair, glancing briefly at his First Officer as if debating whether he should ask him to leave. Seeing Spock stiffen slightly, Kirk changed his mind and turned back to the screen without comment, saying, "Pipe it through, Lieutenant."

A moment later, the face of Admiral Woods filled the screen. Kirk felt a prickle of apprehension on the back of his neck, for communication with the Director of Starfleet Intelligence was rare and almost always undesirable.

"Kirk, is your First Officer there with you?" Woods asked bluntly, wasting no time on preliminary courtesies.

After glancing askance at Spock, Kirk nodded warily at the screen.

"Good. We have rather a special mission for both of you. Are you familiar with Taranna II?"

"The border planet within the Klingon sphere of influence?" The itch on his neck intensified; Kirk did not like the implications of the inquiry. Not another cloak and dagger caper, he groaned to himself. I'm no damn spy.

Apprehensively, he sought the nearby dark eyes for support, but Spock's face was expressionless, his manner devoid of comment.

Woods nodded. "We can give you all that Intelligence has on it in a moment, but it isn't much. Never seemed to be important. The planet's not quite advanced enough to pose a threat to us, and the Klingons never bother with a garrison there either. At least not until now. Reports indicate that the Tarannian Science Center is developing a new weapon - one that could pose a grave threat to us. The curious thing is why, if it's so promising, do the Klingons allow it to remain there, on a fairly open planet, instead of transferring it somewhere deep within their borders, where we couldn't get at it. I want you to get me some answers."

"Admiral," Kirk protested, "surely this's a job for specialized agents, not line officers." Even as he voiced it, Kirk knew his objection would be overruled.

"None available with your expertise, Kirk," Woods replied fluidly. "And to be truthful, it's your First Officer's science knowledge that's actually needed. Our men don't really know what to look for."

Then send him in alone, Kirk's glare said, but Woods either did not notice it or chose to ignore it.

"All we know is this weapon's biological and potent," he continued. "Other than that, info on it is vague and unreliable. I don't know if the reports we have will be of any help to you, but we can't wait to see where they'll spring it on us. We have a basic schematic of the Center available, and a name of the main researcher involved...ah... Whisele. But..."

"And all you want us to do," Kirk interrupted sarcastically, his sense of foreboding overcoming his usual political diplomacy, "is walk in, figure out what they're up to, heist the formula, plans, or whatever, and bring it back on a silver platter. Anything else, Admiral?"

Kirk saw Spock arch his eyebrow in surprise at his insolence, but he did not care. He did not like the sound of this mission, and he wondered suspiciously if there was something more behind it.

There's a rotten feel to this one, Kirk thought. I wish I could refuse it.

Woods responded with a smirk that held no friendliness at all. "This isn't a military installation, Captain," he answered in a tone that made light of the dangers. "It should be an easy job for men of your capabilities."

He paused as if waiting for Kirk to rise to the bait. Kirk traded uneasy glances with his First Officer, but said nothing.

With an air of innocence, Woods continued, "After all, you were highly recommended to me by a good friend of mine. You remember Admiral Komack, don't you? He said you were made for the job. Perfect, in fact."

The hazel eyes narrowed at the mention of his old nemesis. Now he knew he didn't want the mission. Yet if Komack were behind this, there was definitely no way out of accepting it. And he had too much good sense to even try to argue with an Admiral.

Apparently satisfied that Kirk had not objected, Woods proceeded, "You'll

go by shuttle. It's too dangerous to have a starship snooping around. No telling what kind of equipment the Klingons have there, although there don't seem to be sensor shields of any kind. But I'll leave the details to you. And Captain..." he paused, eyeing Kirk. "If you bring back something we can use..."

"Yes, sir. I understand," Kirk answered placidly, hiding the annoyance he felt. I know all about the Empire's gratitude. Spare me the rhetoric, he added silently.

"Very well, Captain. If there are no questions, I'll squirt the tapes to you."

Kirk shook his head negatively, then gestured Spock over to the screen to take care of the encoded information. Meanwhile, he leaned back in his chair and studied his First Officer thoughtfully.

Jobs that were passed off as easy walk-throughs usually turned out to be highly dangerous. If that were so in this case, then there was no-one he wanted more to stand beside him than his efficient and dependable First Officer. There was no-one with whom he worked better as a team, for Spock always seemed to anticipate his actions, his orders.

Yet, on any mission where they would be alone, together, without the security of henchmen surrounding them, there was always the question of trust. At times, he felt that Spock was the only subordinate officer from whom he didn't have to guard his back constantly. But even then he remained wary, always reminding himself that such confidence could be misplaced in the Vulcan. After all, he could never be sure that Spock would always come through for him in a crisis. In the final analysis, the Vulcan might be as self-serving as the rest.

One doesn't willingly put one's head in a noose, Kirk thought, just to see if the cord will be pulled. And if Komack is behind this mission, it could indeed be a noose for me.

It wasn't just paranoid speculation that there could be a sinister reason underlying his selection; the Captain was quite aware that he had a few enemies who would be only too delighted to be rid of him.

As Spock flipped off the viewer and retrieved the tape from the computer, Kirk stared at him uncertainly. If Komack were indeed after his hide, then how wise was it to have his Second-in-command nearby for the kill, regardless of where Spock's loyalties seemed to lie?

Tempted to disregard orders, Kirk thought about taking along one of his own henchmen - someone on his personal payroll - as backup instead of Spock. Yet, there was no-one who had the necessary expertise, or whom he really did trust more than the officer presently standing in front of him.

When the dark eyes clouded at his too-obvious stare, Kirk realized how long he had been watching Spock. Quickly he masked his uncertainty and beckoned Spock closer. "All right. Let's see what we have."

* * *

Kirk shifted restlessly in his seat, the quiet grating on his nerves. Even though the exterior of the shuttle had been disguised to resemble a Klingon vessel, the interior was all standard Empire equipment and thus, piloting it through open space was rather boring business, especially with the sophisticated computer that controlled it. Once again, he was experiencing the sensation of uselessness such flying often gave him, knowing that until they reached the vicinity of their destination, there would be little to do.

There was too much time for solitude, too much time for reflection.

Glancing over to where Spock sat, Kirk saw that his First Officer was deeply engrossed in some kind of computer activity.

It's just as well, Kirk contemplated, since he's never interested in idle conversation. He almost wished he could have brought Marlena along to while away the hours, for any diversion would be welcome at this point.

He stared out the viewscreen at the universe he called home, but the stars that had always entranced him seemed barren and cold. Suddenly, he felt stifled by the emptiness that surrounded them, for it evoked a hollowness inside himself of which he had only recently become aware. He was uncomfortable with such feelings, for he could neither forget them when they surfaced nor find something that truly filled the void they brought.

He wondered if Spock ever felt that way, whether cold steel and indifference ever bothered him, whether he ever sensed a cage that had no key to it.

Involuntarily, he turned toward the Vulcan, only to be startled by the dark eyes regarding him, noting his restlessness. Non-plussed, he fought the urge to squirm and forced his eyes back to the stars, chastising himself for even questioning whether there was something more to life than he had.

Still, he wondered whether Vulcans ever concerned themselves with such questions. He was tempted to ask Spock, except that he was unwilling to admit that his life was any less satisfying than it should be.

Instead, he kept his eyes glued to the viewscreen, reassuring himself that his present discontent stemmed merely from his dislike of spy missions. He was uncomfortable with these kinds of surreptitious games, with sneaking around in darkness and quiet, with stealing things under the constant apprehension of being captured. It always reminded him of his mortality in a way the being a starship captain did not.

He felt that he was born to flex his muscles in battle and in personal combat, born to dare the unknown and discover new horizons, born to debate, to argue, to convince. That had purpose, excitement. But this...

Squirming from boredom again, he turned to Spock with a sigh. Having nothing better to do, he suggested, "Let's go over our plan one more time."

For endless uncomfortable seconds, Spock said nothing, eyeing his Captain in transparent curiosity, until Kirk felt like he was being scrutinized to his very soul.

"The strategy you have laid out is rather simple and **straight-forward**," Spock pointed out.

Kirk shrugged, trying to shake off the sensation of vulnerability. "Complications can always set in. Doesn't hurt to go over things again," he insisted, irritated that he should feel the need to explain himself. "Enough can go wrong as it is. I don't want any misunderstandings, any mistakes."

The silence stretched out between them.

"Very well, Captain," Spock answered finally, disengaging the program he had been running in the computer before turning his full attention to Kirk.

* * *

On the outskirts of the town was a wooded area, and Kirk headed the shuttle towards it in the hopes of finding a convenient hiding place for the craft. Selecting a suitable location, he hovered over the clearing while Spock initiated a quick sensor sweep to insure there were no witnesses nearby. Then he landed it without difficulty.

For a few minutes, both men were busy shutting down systems, locking down the computer against intruders, turning life support down to a minimum.

"That about does it," Kirk commented as he rose out of the pilot seat. He took the liberty of stretching his muscles before nodding towards the hatch. "All right, Spock, let's go. The sooner we get this over with, the better."

"Agreed, Captain." Spock reached for the cap that would cover his ears. They were already dressed in the simple garments of the Tarannians, but Spock had seen no need to don the uncomfortable head-covering until absolutely necessary.

"Must be an inconvenience," Kirk commiserated, aware that the rough-textured clothing was uncomfortable in comparison to the satins and velours the Service provided, feeling a twinge of sympathy for Spock, whose Vulcan anatomy always made head-gear a necessity on missions like these, regardless of what the weather might be.

"A minor one, Captain." As he handed Kirk a phaser, he didn't realize that his words negated a fragile moment of empathy.

Without replying, Kirk tucked the weapon into the hidden pocket of his open jacket, moved to the hatch, and released the lock.

A quick scan told him there was no-one nearby. "Our luck's still holding," he called as he stepped away from the shuttle. He gave the area a more careful perusal while Spock took care of the ship.

"In that direction, Captain," Spock offered, coming up behind Kirk, letting him set the lead.

The buildings in the town were much like those on many planets in the Empire - built of steel and metal alloys that caught the rays of the sun and gleamed brightly. Instead of the austere beauty of functional pre-planning that the Starbases had, the architecture here had the wild loveliness of individuality. But the beauty was lost on the Human, who was interested only in getting the job done as quickly and as safely as possible.

They found it easy to walk casually through the streets without any undue notice being taken of them. All apprehensions of being recognized as aliens due to a strange gesture or motion were soon allayed. Those Tarrannians whom they met passed them by without interest, and they made it to the town's interior without incident.

There were only a few hours of daylight left when they reached the Science Center. Aware that a wrong move could be their undoing, they cautiously reconnoitered the outside area, confirming their previous information that the Center consisted of interlocking buildings with well-guarded entrances.

Comparing what he saw with the layout he had memorized from the reports, Kirk was impressed with Starfleet Intelligence; and for the first time on this mission, he let himself relax a bit.

"Do you think we need some kind of uniform to get past the guards?" Kirk asked thoughtfully. "Or can we just walk in?" If it were possible, he wanted to scout out the inside also, to know what he was up against before he made his move.

Spock looked over the various groups that meandered or rushed in every direction. "There appears to be no particular dress code, Captain, but if we wander in without a specific destination in mind..."

"No necessarily," Kirk cut in, seeing a group of people about to enter precisely the building they were interested in. He tapped Spock's arm and pointed, mumbling, "C'mon" as he hurried toward them without further explanation.

It was, as Kirk had expected, a tour group; within its safe confines, they entered the building without risk. From this vantage point, they were able to survey the interior of the place, to locate the positions of the guards without arousing suspicion.

Kirk was relieved to note that the guards seemed to be native Tarrannians, and not Klingon militia on special assignment. In fact, their manner did not suggest any more training than was normally given to civilian security men. This would make infiltration easier, for they wouldn't have to worry about cracking military discipline while stumbling through unfamiliar territory.

All relief aside, Kirk still intended to work with the care of penetrating a starbase. He wanted no surprises, knowing that no matter who the guards were, escape would be much more difficult once the presence of intruders was known.

Ignoring the droning voice of the guide, Kirk studied his surroundings. He noted that new sections appeared to be grafted onto older ones; that the walls in some areas were of modern construction, while others consisted of painted concrete brick; that there were no windows of any kind in the newer labs, while frosted plastic covered those in the old wings. He reflected that no matter where one went, it seemed to be a universal law of economics that lab space was too expensive to abandon and rebuild, that new technology was always added onto, but never entirely replaced, what came before.

It wasn't long before Kirk became impatient with the slow progress of the tour group. He took the first opportunity to slip away, gesturing Spock towards a deserted stairway.

Fully aware that they had no cover story to give anyone who asked, they entered other levels surreptitiously, fading into the shadows at the approach of footsteps. But it was soon apparent that they couldn't get close to their real destination without chancing discovery, so they gave up and retreated to wait for nightfall.

"The only feasible approach," Kirk said, outlining his plan while they crouched among some boxes in a deserted alley, "seems to be through the storage area in the far wing on the complex."

Spock nodded his agreement. Though the Center was not heavily guarded, anything more direct would be too dangerous.

* * *

Under the cover of darkness, the two men slipped into the empty building and moved quietly through the corridors until they were brought up short by the sound of voices. Flattening themselves against the walls, they carefully inched their way until Kirk stopped only centimeters from a connecting passageway.

At first, the Captain just listened intently; then he realized that the voices were too muffled to understand. He decided to gamble on a cautious look.

The sight of the open doorway in the middle of an empty corridor brought a sigh of relief, along with the knowledge that they couldn't slip past it.

Pursing his lips, Kirk pulled back and glanced around, searching for another way for them. Spock gestured toward a nearby darkened hallway, and Kirk nodded. It seemed to be the only other choice. He motioned Spock forward and followed warily, phaser in his tensed hand.

The passageway opened onto a platform in a large storage room, and Kirk crouched upon it to consider their next move. For security, he held the phaser poised in readiness, listening to the silence.

The emptiness grated on Kirk's nerves. "What do you think, Spock?" he whispered. "Do you remember the layout of this place?"

"It was rather sketchily drawn, Captain," he admitted, apologizing for the lack of definite information. "But our only other option is back the way we came."

Kirk frowned and looked around. The area beneath them was dimly lighted, but it seemed to be filled with stacked crates. Although he couldn't see very far into the room, he doubted that there was any way out of it.

The platform they were on narrowed into a steel cross-walk running along one wall. It was open, except for a guard-railing that wouldn't offer much protection, and Kirk didn't like the exposure they would have to risk. He could see several places that could easily obscure guards until it was too late, but also knew there was no alternative. The only exit was at its end.

"That seems to be the only way," he whispered, pointing to the cross-walk. "We'll have to take it one at a time."

Spock nodded and glanced about, listening intently - but even his hearing had limits. "There does not seem to be anyone nearby," he offered cautiously.

Kirk grinned tightly, the expression of every soldier who flushed out the unknown. Every nerve in his body was on alert, his senses honed finely and ready for battle. "I'll go first. Cover me."

Crouching low, he padded in cat-like silence, covering the distance quickly, leaving no echo in the stillness to mark his passage. When he made it to the end, he knelt by the railing and gestured for Spock to start over.

"Halt!" The command reverberated through the quiet.

Kirk jerked his head toward the sound, aiming his phaser in one fluid motion. There was no time to think, to wonder where the guard had come from, for there was a disruptor pointed directly at the Vulcan.

"Watch out!" he yelled, and fired, conscious that on his shout, Spock had dropped flat. At the same time, the beam disintegrated the enemy.

A barely noticeable noise from below focused his attention in that direction. On instinct, without conscious thought, he leaped up, dodging to the side, aiming and bringing down the second man in one continuous move, just as the disruptor beam tore through his former position. It missed him, but it shattered the wall next to him, the force of the blast throwing him against the railing.

Pain tore through his chest as he impacted with the unyielding steel and ricocheted over the top to the storage room floor below, crashing into the wooden crates to lie limp and unconscious.

* * *

His eyes opened to the sight of Spock crouching next to him, leaning over him to remove the containers that half-buried him. But he had little time to think about that as his breath caught sharply. The agony that laced each inhalation brought tears to his eyes and his first instinct was to wrap his arms around his chest.

Almost immediately, he forced his arms back to his sides, clenching his fists, feeling the need to put up a brave pose for his First Officer, to disguise how much he hurt. To lessen the pain as much as possible, he concentrated on breathing slowly and shallowly while he watched Spock reach for the tricorder, examine it, and toss it aside.

"Broken," Spock offered in explanation. "If I may?" He probed Kirk's chest gently, but the prickling fire of bone grating together forced Kirk to groan and to flinch away from the touch.

"I cannot tell how many ribs you have fractured," Spock commented, "but fortunately the skin remains unbroken and there is no major chest depression. However, there may be some internal damage if bone fragments have injured..." His voice trailing off, he put his ear to Kirk's chest as if to listen to the sound of the Human's breathing.

"What are you doing?" Kirk asked, attempting to move. The motion brought excruciating pain, and Kirk didn't need the staying hand to stop him. He pushed the moan back down his throat before it could escape and fought to get his ragged breathing under control.

"You do not have a collapsed lung," Spock answered firmly, "but you should not move. To return to the shuttle..."

"No!" Kirk cut in, shaking his head emphatically. "We've a job to do... And we'd better... do it... before... the guards... are missed... before someone... comes looking... for them..." Hurting more than he cared to admit, Kirk found talking difficult.

"You are in no condition to proceed with the mission."

The dark eyes harbored concern and warning, but in the immediacy of the moment, Kirk brushed aside the image without it fully registering on his consciousness. Instead, his hazel eyes mirrored their own plea, one that asked for

help in accomplishing the impossible, one that sought strength to deny reality.

"We have to... no choice... if you help me up..."

"And let you puncture a lung?" Spock admonished and shook his head. "No, Captain. The shuttle..."

"Spock you know what happens to captains who fail their missions," Kirk insisted, his voice almost begging. "Missions like these can be hatchet jobs. I can't afford... to give them any leverage." Especially Komack. I won't let the bastard think that there's anything I can't do. And win. You must help me.

When the Vulcan did not answer immediately, Kirk took it as affirmation, although confirmation was really unnecessary. It was a fact of their lives: failure was not tolerated in the Empire. Those who came home empty-handed were often as good as dead.

And Kirk had not worked so hard to get where he was to give it up lightly: the fear of the possible consequences of returning home at this point strengthened his determination. He tried once more to move, only to be restrained again.

"I will procure what's needed and come back..."

"Let you go," Kirk cut in, shaking his head vehemently, "so you can strand me here?" He tried to ignore the stabbing pain, forcing the words out in short breaths, hands clenched tightly into fists in a desperate channeling of his inner strength.

"Do you think I'm a fool? Let you go and grab the glory for yourself? Not on your life." He started to cough, gasping for air, almost giving in, almost ready to admit defeat.

Spock waited until the Captain quieted before speaking. "If you persist in this matter, it will be your life. You may perforate a lung," Spock lectured. He softened his voice as Kirk glared at him. "Let me do this."

Kirk wanted to give in to the pain, to just lie there until it went away, to stop trying to do what he obviously couldn't. He knew that if he rested quietly, he could almost conquer the pain. But to stop now, he believed with unquestioning conviction, would bring certain death. At least if he tried...

He started to protest again, but was cut off immediately.

"I will be back as soon as possible," Spock said firmly, handing Kirk his phaser for protection and returning his own to its concealing pocket.

"Sure you will," Kirk snorted, fingering the trigger in response to a half-formed thought. "I won't let you go without me."

Spock pressed his lips together, his dark eyes betraying his impatience. "Captain, be reasonable..."

"I can't stay here," Kirk argued, changing his tactics. "Someone may have heard us. The phaser whine. The crash."

"The walls are too thick for sound to carry far. No-one has come. And no-one will for some time," Spock explained. "I will make certain of that," he promised.

"I'll make it an order if I have to. I won't let you strand me here."

It was becoming a litany of desperation to Kirk, but lessons in self-preservation had long ago taught him not to be left behind... because no-one ever turned back.

"If I did, how would I explain it?" Spock retorted, impatience turning to anger.

Kirk almost laughed at that. "Who'd even question it? You know the Service as well as I. They'll make you Captain for it," he jibed.

Spock stared at him for a moment, then turned reluctantly away, intending

to stand and leave. "Believe what you will."

Is there another choice? he wanted to cry out as he grabbed for Spock's arm. He knew it was risky, daring Spock like this, but he couldn't give in now. If he did... if he did...

"Don't go. Not yet."

He wanted desperately to believe, to know that his life wouldn't end here on this distant impersonal planet. Yet to gamble with his life was high stakes indeed, and he had never been able to rely on anyone... not his parents... not Sam... not Gary...

He had pounded it into his brain: a man can only count on himself. Once the information was in Spock's possession, all he had to do was retrace his steps to the shuttle and take off. No-one would be the wiser.

When Spock turned back to face him, Kirk's voice was weak, filled with the distrust and uncertainty warring in his soul. "You say you'll return, Spock, but why should you? I want to trust you, but why should I?"

Spock pressed his lips together in resignation to the old argument. "If you seek betrayal in everyone, Captain, there is no basis for teamwork."

"Teamwork applies only to the strong, Mr. Spock. The capable. As long as you can hold your own with the others, you are safe with them." He shrugged as if this were a recitation that should not need repeating. "But one slip and the vultures are waiting to tear your bones apart."

He looked hard at Spock, wishing he could read the other's inner depths, wishing that he had not been trapped in a position which made him vulnerable enough to need reassurance.

"It's a serious business to rely on anyone but yourself," he added quietly, knowing that his options were few.

"The individual is neither indestructible nor omnipotent. You might like to insist that you can do everything yourself, but you depend on 430 people every day. Without them, the ENTERPRISE could not function and space exploration would be impossible."

"You talk about trust, Mr. Spock, as if it were a simple exercise in logic. But it isn't easy to have faith. If you aren't suspicious of everyone, you may find your 'friend' sticking a knife in your back. Your enemies aren't the ones who can get close enough to stab you."

Spock waited without commentary, eyeing his Captain thoughtfully.

With the silence lending encouragement, Kirk asked softly the one question for which he had never had an answer himself. "How would you even know whom to trust?" Then he overlaid it with a strong, "I won't let anyone steal what is rightfully mine," effectively destroying the moment of camaraderie.

"Argument is pointless and time-consuming. I must go." Spock stood and turned to leave.

Suddenly, irrationally, Kirk resented Spock's arrogant confidence that he could accomplish what his Captain could not. Fuming, he swore that he would not owe another thing to his First Officer. If Spock thought he was just going to wait helplessly upon his mercy... if Spock thought he would beg for aid...

"I don't need anyone," he grated. "I can make it on my own."

He tried to get up, but the movement sent a jagged wave of pain tearing through him. Fire knifed along his insides as he doubled up and fell back. Darkness descended even as the scream was wrenched from his throat. His last conscious thought was of strong arms around him, buffering the impact with the floor.

Kirk awoke to find himself propped up against the storage containers in such a way that he would elude easy detection, yet still be able to defend himself if he were discovered.

"Spock? Spock?" he called softly, but there was no answer. "So, I'm alone," he said to himself. "The bastard's split."

Though it hurt even to breathe, Kirk felt he had to test his limits, to determine if he could regain his feet and escape. Yet, despite the effort to move slowly and with utmost care, the slightest tug jarred excruciatingly, causing him to fall back with a groan.

"No good," he murmured, knowing that if he tried to reach the shuttle by himself, he would risk tearing his body apart. He needed help.

"I'm stuck here until Spock returns," he concluded, resigning himself to settle back and wait.

It surprised him to realize that he did expect the Vulcan to come back for him, that he did believe in Spock's promise, that he did not think he was just waiting for eventual discovery. With nothing else to do except dwell on his suffering, he let his thoughts wander to why this was so - why he felt more comfortable relying on Spock - an alien for the most part - than on any of the Humans he had ever known. Was it because Spock was Vulcan and thus not subject to the same ambitions, moods, and vacillation - on one side today and another tomorrow?

The answer lay partially in the subliminal security he was drawing from his surroundings. It was obvious that Spock had taken care in hiding him. Gone was the wreckage into which he had crashed - a dead give-away that something was amiss. Instead, he was hidden among ordered stacks of goods - a maze that would look normal to the unsuspecting eye and would take either a direct search or an extraordinary piece of bad luck on his part to detect him.

Kirk appreciated what such care indicated. He was warmed by the knowledge that Spock would not have spent the time and effort necessary to hide him if the Vulcan planned to desert his Commanding Officer.

Second, the fact that Spock had left him his phaser relaxed him. If the Vulcan planned to strand him here, he would not have worried whether or not Kirk could defend himself, providing another solid example to support those intangible feelings which prompted Kirk to believe in his First Officer.

These intangibles were harder to reason out than to defend or deny, for they were hazy impressions based on instinct and what had happened in the past.

As he drifted in and out of consciousness, he lethargically sought refuge in images of times when he had trusted Spock and the Vulcan had come through for him - hazy reflections of the rare times of something more between them than distrust and forced camaraderie.

Hours passed while Kirk remained in this state of semi-awareness, rocked in peace, hope, and security. Eventually, the realization of elapsed time permeated the haze, and he awoke abruptly, fully conscious of the silence and isolation of his surroundings.

"No," he moaned in instinctive denial, then forced himself to face facts: if Spock were coming back, he would have done so by now.

"No more," he told himself as the sense of betrayal and damaged pride cut deep. It hurt more than the emptiness with which he was used to living, for the betrayal of fledgling trust not only brought an ache for what was being denied, but anger for being used, and bitterness for being foolish enough to believe in it in the first place. And yet, the doors once opened were not easily closed, and Kirk resented having to argue himself back into his old mode of self-reliance.

Acknowledging that he was once again on his own, Kirk contemplated his alternatives. He was surprised that he had not been discovered by now, but he did not dwell very long on his good fortune because he had more important things

to consider. By now the Vulcan was on his way back to the ENTERPRISE, and even if Kirk did manage to send a message home, would anyone listen after having heard Spock's fabricated cover story? If Kirk were captured, he'd be executed, or turned over to the Klingons.

What was left? He cursed his First Officer vociferously.

Soft sounds interrupted his reverie. Jerking his head in the indicated direction, he strained, but could see nothing. With his phaser gripped tightly in nervous anticipation, he waited and watched, alertly scanning the darkened room.

His nerves were taut from the barely audible sound of approach, electrified with apprehension for the unseen presence, tight with the futility of his helpless position. The muffled footsteps seemed to reverberate loudly with a stifling sense of doom.

"Damn Starfleet!" he swore, consigning to hell all bureaucrats who played with paper and thought up these assignments, castigating himself for his oath, his duty, his loyalty, his very presence here.

Tension bunched his muscles until his eyes watered from the increased pressure on his aching ribcage. Pain added to pain. "Damn you, Spock!"

A moment later, Spock staggered into sight, halting to stare at the phaser aimed point-blank at him.

Time passed awkwardly as the threat hung suspended between them, until Kirk dropped his weapon to his side, his tension easing as the Vulcan approached.

Noting that the Vulcan could barely walk, his eyes were drawn to the green-stained pants. Judging by the trembling and swaying of the slender body, Spock had lost a lot of blood.

So that's what took him so long, Kirk sighed in relief. He can barely stand, let alone walk. I don't know how he made it back.

Quick on the heels of that thought came the question - why? Why did Spock return at all? He could have gone straight to the shuttle. There are medical supplies there. And safety. Here...

He watched as Spock collapsed at his side. He saw the pain flash across the angular features, though the Vulcan strove to control it. Slowly, Spock's face resumed its rigidity, but the lines of stress betrayed how much was being held inside.

"Spock, how bad is it?" Kirk queried gently, his eyes never leaving the Vulcan's face.

"Bad enough, Captain," he answered slowly, taking deep breaths to steady himself. "But I can travel."

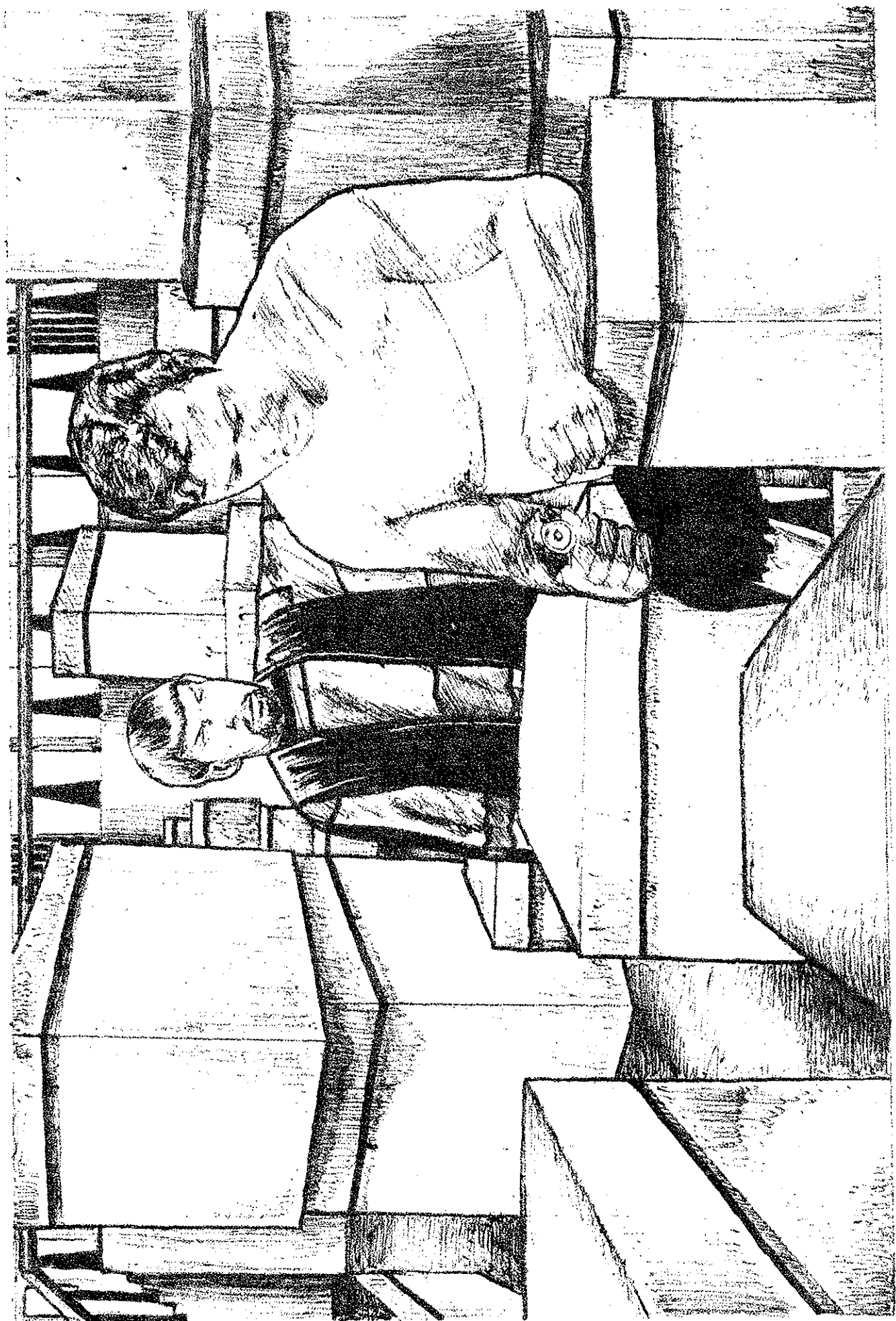
"You don't look like you have the energy to move another step," Kirk chided. We're both in great shape, he thought despondently. Two cripples. Why did you come back?

"There is not much time, Captain. On my return, I accidentally ran into... they are searching for us now. I believe I have sufficiently confused them, but I would advise against wasting time." As he talked, he raised his eyes, and fastened them on Kirk's.

That he could read Kirk's concern and confusion was apparent in the softened tone that followed. "Do not worry. Give me a few minutes to regain control and then I will get us both to the shuttle."

Realizing how much of his inner turmoil his face must be revealing, Kirk sought to hide his emotion behind a scowl, to bury his relief at the Vulcan's return so deeply that Spock would never see it, to obliterate all evidence of concern or care.

"I didn't think you'd come back," he accused, managing to put some



compensating harshness into his voice. "I thought you'd grab the documentation and run, go back to the shuttle and take off." Leave me stranded here. Why didn't you?

Spock didn't answer, but the words irritated him as Kirk had hoped they would. He yanked open the bag he was carrying and wrenched out the bandages with undisguised ferocity.

"I said that I would come back for you," he answered with unconcealed resentment. "Why do you never believe me?"

"Because..." Kirk's voice trailed off. His temper flared in response to the inner craving to ask Spock why he would come back for him... to ask him if... perhaps...

Those were questions that could never be asked, for if the answers were negative, there was no place to go, no place to hide. Because I couldn't even trust my own brother not to desert me. Not when it suited his purposes, he finished to himself, aching with a wound that the passage of time could never heal.

"It is illogical never to trust anyone."

Kirk's head jerked up abruptly; he wondered if he had spoken aloud and Spock had heard him, but the Vulcan was intent on unravelling the roll of cloth. Kirk bit back the instinctive retort and watched Spock in silence, amazed that the Vulcan had thought to procure bandages before returning. Perhaps...

Warmed by the thought, Kirk's voice softened. "It was a foolish gesture to come back. If they have search parties out, it'll be tough enough for you to escape. I'll only hamper you." He paused and waited for a reply. When none came he added, "Someone's got to get that info to Starfleet. You may as well finish what you've started."

"What I found is important, but not all that vital. Given time and sufficient insight into the nature of the research, our scientists could have duplicated it."

"What?" The disclosure startled Kirk. "Then why...? Damn Komack!" And if you'd been like any other officer, he'd have gotten what he wanted.

For a moment neither man spoke.

"I regret that I could not find any analgesic, Captain," Spock apologized as he reached toward Kirk, tape laid across his lap. "It would have made it easier on you. Let me help you."

Spock carefully pulled Kirk's shirt free from his trousers, unbuttoned it to get access to his bruised chest, and eased it off his Captain's shoulders, together with the open jacket that covered it. Still, Kirk's breath caught as he was handled.

The pain reminded Kirk how difficult escape would be; neither of them might make it in their condition. Spock's slow and unsteady movements told him that the Vulcan was also hurting more than he let on. Suddenly, it was enough that Spock had returned for him. He didn't want the Vulcan to sacrifice his life, too, just to prove a point. Spock wasn't the only one who could feel concern.

You don't have to do this for me, Spock, Kirk thought.

"No sense in both of us being caught," Kirk murmured, trying once more to convince Spock to leave him. "I could protect your retreat from here."

"Inhale as deeply as you can, Captain, then exhale slowly," Spock instructed, ignoring Kirk's last comment. "Let the air all the way out and hold it."

"I know. I know," he answered, irritated that the Vulcan wasn't listening to him. But he complied with the Vulcan's demands, holding his breath while Spock wrapped the cloth binding tightly around his chest from armpit to below his ribcage.

After checking to see that Kirk could breathe without being hampered by the binding, Spock helped the Captain back into his shirt and jacket, arranging them carefully over the bandages.

"That should give you the support you need, Captain." He stood up gingerly while Kirk buttoned his own shirt, waiting for him to finish. Then he extended his hand to the Human. "Let me help you up," he offered.

Kirk stared at the proffered hand for a moment without moving, then slowly raised his eyes to meet Spock's. With every syllable a question of its own, he said tentatively, quietly, "I can't... I can't make it... alone, Spock."

Spock gazed silently at him for a moment, then bracing himself, he bent down and grasped Kirk firmly, pulling him carefully to his feet. "Then lean on me, Captain," he answered, as he steadied Kirk against his shoulder.

They managed to stumble out of the building and through the shadowy byways of the city without being seen, moving from door to door down dim, barren alleys, always fearful that time would run out and the enemy would appear.

Sweat covered Kirk's skin, dampening the bandages and the cloth shirt over them, but he clenched his teeth against any outcry. He could feel the trembling in the lean body beside him, for despite Vulcan stamina, Spock was exhausted.

There were times when he felt like Spock was dragging him along more than guiding him, but there were also others when the Vulcan's leg gave way and Spock would have fallen if not for his support. It made the acceptance of help easier, and he was thankful for that.

The way they chose was relatively dark, even in the dim, dawning light of morning, and it was devoid of people. They both knew how dangerous it would be if even one person became suspicious of two wounded men stumbling...

* * *

"Captain."

McCoy's voice interrupted the flow of memory and brought him back to the present, to the cell.

"Have you figured a way out of here?" McCoy asked when he had Kirk's attention.

Kirk stared at the Doctor as if he couldn't really see him. Shaking his head slowly, he said aloud, "Not yet." But to himself he added, No solution... but I have an answer.

On the flight back from Taranna II, they had talked of loneliness for the first time - of the isolation of command, of people who were homeless, of those stranded alone by choice among the stars, of those who sought a refuge that was offered nowhere else.

This tentative beginning, he now realized, had culminated in the rescue on Demetzia, where he had gone out of his way to save his First Officer. Indeed, there he had finally admitted to himself that he needed Spock, rambling on to the unconscious Vulcan while they had waited for the end of the battle and for the ship to beam them up. The talk had been about how good a team they were together, about how successful their missions always were, but he had come so close to revealing himself - so close that he had been grateful that Spock could not hear him. Yet, even then, he had wondered if...

"NO!"

With desperate self-denial, Kirk's consciousness came crashing back to his present predicament. Reality was the brig in which he was being held, and the Vulcan who had put him there.

What did you expect? This betrayal's the result of your foolishness, he berated himself silently. While you've been out there building trust out of illusions and ignoring all the rules you taught yourself for survival, he's

been plotting all along to stab you in the back. To catch you off guard. Now he's taken everything - your ship, your freedom. And you sit here dredging up past mistakes. Are you still going to trust him as he leads you to your execution?

"Not you, too, Spock. Not now," he murmured under his breath, unable to deny the ache.

He swiped viciously at the strand of hair that constantly fell onto his forehead, then clenched his fist tightly at his side. Think, man, think! There must be a way out of this cage. You didn't become Captain by wallowing in sentiment. And if you get out of this, you'll never forget your rules again. Never take anything for granted again. Never.

As his mind raced over various cunning and devious avenues of escape, evaluating and rejecting them one by one, Kirk began to retreat farther back into the shell of self-protection he had created for himself - the safe haven that had sustained him throughout his life. He was too busy to notice the change, yet inside, he cried for the need of a friend.

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AT THE APPOINTED PLACE

From days forgotten to distant tomorrows
This is the time to return, to create life, to continue,
Or else to perish in the trying.
Always a repeating pattern
From which no man can escape
However fierce the hope, wild the desperation,
Or strong the force of will.
For as it was so shall it be,
However far the wandering.

It seems wherever we travel
We cannot evade the pulsing compulsion
That draws us home,
That destroys our logic, our basis of decisions,
Essential for disciplining mind and thought.
So powerful the force,
Without compassion,
It drives us on to forsake all sanity.
There is no dignity in emotions without control,
No pride in anger.

This is the source of our future,
The continuation,
From which emerges new life, new beginnings,
Whose actions we cannot alter or try to change,
So come to accept its inevitable course
And know at the appointed place we will meet
To continue.

Gillian Catchpole

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CHAIN REACTION

Frances Abernethy * Lorraine Goodison * Cory King * Hilde McCabe * Allison Rooney

Picking Kirk up for the first time isn't bad but by the 150th time his charm has wilted! Lorraine licked her fingers with glee and gently stroked the tip of McCoy's nose. "Fingers!" shrieked Cory as Scotty slipped gently past her to the floor.

Hilde sat and moaned that too much was coming her way and she couldn't keep it up, looking pointedly at Allison who was playing fast and loose with more of them than anybody else could cope with.

Finally Frances picked Spock up by the ear and passed him over to Sheila on the bed. She soon got stuck in with a muffled "At last!" It's funny how Sheila's always last.

The Missing Link declared, "Could you just hold it like that..."

